

# **A Critical Analysis of the Final Written Exam in English in the Lower Secondary School**

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This thesis is the result of many years of teaching English in the lower secondary school. During this time I have been especially concerned with assessment and testing of pupils' papers in general and with the practice of the final written exam in particular.

I have spent countless hours in front of the PC and among books and articles. This has been a special year for me with my full time job as a teacher and the writing of a master's thesis. I have acquired new knowledge about the teaching of EFL, and my experience as an examiner for 2006 is valuable as well. I believe that the combination of being a teacher of EFL and learning more about the concepts of teaching is extremely useful, and I have been able to see my own teaching in a new light. As teachers we need input and information in order to guide our pupils and encourage them to succeed to the best of their ability.

I am deeply grateful to my daughters for their belief in me and especially my husband Ole Petter, who has encouraged me and helped me with the more technical aspects of my thesis. His support has been of great importance. Furthermore I would like to thank Jarl Håvard Borgen and Carl Magne Isachsen who shared valuable information through the interviews. My thanks are further extended to all my colleagues of EFL in Skien and Porsgrunn who participated in my survey. Liv Handal at the Board of Education and Per Aage Krekling, leader of the test designers for the exam with ICT have also provided me with useful information.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The aim of the study

When I started working on this thesis, my main concern was to write about a topic I felt I was familiar with, and especially interested in. I had already written two term papers about some aspects of the final written exam in English, and I welcomed the opportunity to expand even more on this topic. As a teacher in the lower secondary school since 1993, I have developed an interest in what my colleagues and I have to deal with concerning the final exam in English. There are many interesting questions to be asked: How does the exam influence the day to day activity in the classroom? Do we teach for the test? Are the pupils familiar with the evaluation criteria? Do teachers around the country feel they have sufficient knowledge and competence to guide their pupils through the preparation day and the final exam?

The overall purpose of this thesis is to carry out a critical analysis of the final exam in written English in the lower secondary school according to the syllabus which was implemented in 1997. My main objectives will be to focus on the introduction of booklet at the exam, and the use of the preparation day, both with regard to the teachers' practice, but also from the pupils' point of view. Due to the limitations set with regard to this thesis, I will concentrate primarily on the exam of 2006.

As teachers today we are constantly faced with changes, and from time to time it is pertinent to ask teachers about their opinions. What do they actually think about the changes of curriculum or exam? With the implementation of L97 the exam was changed rather drastically. Two of the innovations were a preparation day, and a booklet for the pupils to read prior to the exam. The questions among teachers were many, and circulars were sent out from the Board of Education. How should we prepare the pupils? In my experience the preparation day is practised quite differently from teacher to teacher, and that was also one area I would like to explore more.

With the school reform of 1997, the final exam of the 10th grade went through a revision. I will give a detailed description of the design of this exam, and the intention behind it in Chapter 3, but in order to establish my interest in this topic I will give some brief background information. I started teaching at the lower secondary school in 1993, and in 1997 we were informed that the exam would change. The first exam according to L97 came into force in 2000, and there were quite a lot of questions among my colleagues as to how to deal with this new exam.

The answers to these questions were not quite obvious, and the administration at the schools seemed to be working to gain new ground. As a consequence, the new exam was subject to quite different procedures at different schools. I believe that many teachers found their own way of working with this exam, and that resulted in different approaches. Two salient issues were the role of the teacher, and how to use the preparation day. During the last seven years I have developed an interest in my fellow teachers' opinion about this exam, and how they work with it. I therefore want to look into the way this exam is put into force, and also what the examiners think about rating this exam.

The primary aims of this thesis are to answer the following questions:

- To what extent is the use of the preparation day in accordance with its intention?
- The booklet, an inspiration or a source of problems? Or a little bit of both?
- To what extent does the exam influence the way English is taught during lower secondary school?
- To what extent do the pupils benefit from the study facilities like the grammar book and the memo sheet?
- Do all pupils get the opportunity to show what they know?
- To what extent has the examiners' task changed after L97?



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## 1.2 Terminology

A few comments have to be made on the terminology used. M87 is an abbreviation for *Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Education in Norway* (English version) while the 1997 syllabus is often labelled L97, and is an abbreviation for *The Curriculum for the 10-year Compulsory School in Norway* (English version). I refer mostly to EFL, English as a foreign language in relation to English as a subject in Norwegian schools. Furthermore, I use the term *task* in the descriptions and the analyses of the exam, since that term replaced the term *exercise* used in previous exams. For the work handed in by the pupils, I use the term *answer*, and sometimes also *exam paper* for the sake of variation. I use the word *pupil* when I refer to the candidates attending the exam.

In the following chapters I refer to the term *examiners' guidelines*, which is a document sent out by the Board of Education, to help the examiners evaluate the pupils' answers. I also describe the form used by the examiners called the *evaluation form*. This is included in the examiners' guidelines and examiners and teachers are encouraged to use it. The term *examiners' report* is a document written by the leader of the group of examiners, and it sums up the experiences and opinions of the examiners.

I mainly use the terms *assess and assessment* which are the prevailing terms. There are many forms of assessment, both formal and informal, and all assessment is a form of evaluation which is a broader term. There are three concepts that are traditionally seen as fundamental to any discussion of assessment and are basic in test theory: *reliability, objectivity and validity*. The reliability of a test is its consistency as an instrument of measurement. This means that a test with a high degree of reliability used on two different occasions should give the same result with the same or comparable examinees. The objectivity of a test is a question of to what extent the examinee's responses can be objectively rated and I will return to this term in Chapter 6 where I discuss objectivity with regard to the examiner's role. Finally the validity

of a test is a question of to what extent the test measures what it is intended to measure (Simensen 1998:267).

### 1.3 Sources, working method and structure

My primary sources are the research material I have collected by means of a survey, two interviews, and the experience I got by signing up as an examiner for the final written exam in English for 2006. In addition I have used the syllabus of 1997 and the written exams from 2000 to 2006. I have also studied and used selectively examiners' guidelines, examiners' reports and a number of circulars and informative letters to the teachers about the exam sent out from the Board of Education from 2000 to 2006. In order to link my thesis to theories of the teaching of reading and writing in EFL I have studied relevant literature on the subject. This comprises both books by well-known linguists, but I have also found it useful to consult different articles about the syllabus of L97, the exams according to L97, and about communicative language testing. One of the journals I have used as a source is *Språk og Språkundervisning*.

I find it pertinent at this point to mention that I have consulted the work of some of my colleagues while working with this thesis. I owe credit to Louise Margaret Hjelmtvedt who wrote her thesis "*Some aspects of the Written Exam 10<sup>th</sup> Grade in English*" in 2004, Synnøve Pettersen who presented her thesis "*The Foundation Course in English: Some aspects of the Written Exam*" in 2001, and also Hilde Beate Lia with her thesis "*Some Aspects of the Teaching of Writing in English as a Foreign Language*". Along with some others these have inspired me and they focus on some of the same objectives as me. According to Hjelmtvedt, the syllabus for the lower and upper secondary school referred to as L97 and R'94 correspond to a large degree in targets and objectives. Hence I believe it is useful to look into what the pupils can expect when they move on to upper secondary school.

One of my research questions is to what extent the examiner's task has changed compared to previous syllabuses. Is the question of validity and reliability looked after the way it should be? Will the pupils of 2006 have the same assurance that their texts are objectively evaluated as the pupils in 1996? In order to familiarize myself more with these questions I signed up to be an examiner myself, and thus I joined examiners from three different counties. My task was to grade about 150 papers, and this was a very useful experience for me as an English teacher and for the issues of this thesis. In addition to the fact that working with this thesis has been very rewarding for me personally, the findings of a thesis like this might be of interest, both to my fellow teachers, the local school board and to the national school authorities. The intention of the final exam is to enable the students to show what they know and have learnt, and to obtain a result to the best of their ability.

### **1.3.1 The questionnaire**

In order to answer my research questions I had to find out what pupils, teachers and examiners thought about the use of booklet and the preparation day. One important source of information in this thesis is the material I have collected by means of a survey. I aimed at collecting data about the teachers' point of view about the final exam in English in the lower secondary school. Thus I chose a quantitative approach to the collection of data, and the tool I used was a questionnaire. I chose to make use of a convenience sample when I sent out the questionnaires to teachers in my area, and I simply approached all the teachers in the lower secondary schools who teach English and who were familiar with the exam according to L97. The questionnaires were completed by 46 teachers from Skien and Porsgrunn, all of them teachers in the lower secondary school.

To make it as easy as possible for the teachers, I wrote the questionnaire in Norwegian, and the only requirement on my part was that they ticked out the response alternatives they found most appropriate. Another aspect to consider when embarking on a questionnaire is how to create the best response alternatives. The

important issues are that the alternatives cover the area you are interested in, and that the persons involved find it easy to respond. After reflecting about this, and consulting my advisor I decided to use: I totally agree – I agree – I agree to some extent – I do not agree – I don't know. Constructing a questionnaire is a challenge, and there are many different aspects to consider. First of all I had to decide how many questions I wanted to include, and make sure that I covered all the issues I found important. The phrasing of the questions took some time to complete and I chose to perform a small pilot study at my workplace to have my first draft tried and tested to avoid mistakes. As it turned out the teachers I used as guinea pigs seemed to think that the questions were explicit and easy to relate to.

In order to carry out this survey I had to have an approval from the local school authorities both in Skien and Porsgrunn, and I also sent out an introductory letter to all the headmasters and teachers in the lower secondary school (See appendix no. 1). I know from experience that there are many demands on teachers in the day to day work at school, and we are often asked to participate in surveys or take time to extra curricular activities.

After collecting the data, I employed Excel in order to find out how the responses were distributed among the categories I had chosen, and I will present these in Chapter 8 where I will discuss the findings of my survey. My main objectives were to see if the survey had produced results or revealed attitudes that I found interesting, and which seemed to bring about new knowledge. However, a survey like this only gives an insight into the opinions of a certain number of teachers. In order to investigate the topics further I would have had to follow up by a more qualitative approach and interview some of the teachers. For the purpose of the present thesis I decided to use the material from the questionnaire and supplement it with two interviews only.

### **1.3.2 The interviews**

In order to have a qualitative approach to the collection of data, I have carried out two interviews with experienced examiners to be included in my thesis. When I embarked on this thesis I knew that I wanted to look into the examiners' point of view. I used two persons I knew, one who has been an examiner for many years, and one who has been an examiner for the last three years. The interviews of this study may be characterized as structured. I used a number of predetermined questions I wanted to ask them, and they had some time to prepare and reflect upon these questions before I recorded the interviews. The questions were in Norwegian to make it more convenient for the examiners to answer freely. I then translated the questions and the answers from the examiners as accurately as possible. They have both read through the interviews and accepted the fact that I include these in my thesis. The interviews are dealt with in Chapter 6.

### **1.3.3 Structure**

In the following section I will give a more detailed description of the contents and purposes of the various chapters.

In Chapter 2 I look into the state of the art, and due to the scope of this thesis I concentrate primarily on L97. I give a description of the main parts of the English syllabus. Furthermore, I devote my attention to aims and targets which are tested in the final written exam. In this chapter I look into the main objectives of the communicative and meaning-oriented approach to teaching as the current teaching theory of EFL.

Chapter 3 contains the rationale behind the introduction of the exam according to L97. Here I give a detailed description of the different elements of the exam, the preparation day, the booklet, the teacher's role and I include background information about the intention of the exam, and some points of view expressed by test designers.

I have called Chapter 4 ‘Read and Relate’ which mirrors the title of Part A of the exam. In this Chapter my primary objective is the teaching of reading and reading comprehension. I discuss different approaches to reading, and the development of reading skills. I refer to literature which states that extensive reading is of great significance to the skills of writing, and I point out the importance the teaching of reading has for the final exam in written English.

In Chapter 5 I deal with the teaching of writing. I base much of my material on the book by S.C. Weigle “Assessing Writing”, but I have also consulted other books and articles about the subject. The process of writing is one of the productive modes in the English school subject, and the teaching of writing has been subjected to many changes over the years according to the current theory on teaching. With regard to the final exam after L97, the communicative approach to teaching also applies to the teaching of writing, and an important goal is that the pupils will learn how to express their opinions and communicate through their texts. Furthermore I focus on what characterizes a good writer, and how to help the pupils develop good writing skills. In this chapter I also devote some attention to the process oriented approach to writing which has gained ground in the English school subject over the last decade.

In Chapter 6 I focus on assessment and testing in the final written exam. First I give a brief historical perspective where I look into the major trends of assessment during the last five decades. Due to the scope of this thesis, I focus mainly on the communicative and meaning-oriented trend, but I find it interesting to look into previous methods of assessing pupils’ texts as well. I have to a large extent consulted the book by A.M Simensen “*Teaching a foreign language – Principles and procedures*” in this chapter, but I also devote much of the chapter to the examiner’s role. I discuss the questions of validity and reliability in testing, and I am especially concerned with the examiner’s use of personal judgement. I give a description of the evaluation form used by examiners and teachers today, and focus on which criteria are being emphasized in the forms.

In Chapter 7 I give a description of the final exam given from 2000 to 2006. I have focused on the different tasks given in Part A, the opportunity to choose between tasks and the importance of the pictures and illustrations. An important objective in this chapter is the genre awareness in the tasks in Part B, and I also focus on the cultural aspects of the syllabus which is reflected in the tasks in the Free Writing part. I provide examples taken from the final exams to underline the different aspects. At the end of Chapter 7 I also include a description of this year's exam in English with ICT which is a model used by an increasing number of pupils. This exam is designed by a different group of test designers, and it is different in several ways.

In Chapter 8 I discuss the findings of the questionnaire I handed out to a number of teachers. There were 28 questions for the teachers to answer, and I discuss most of them in this chapter. I report the findings, and then I discuss them. I also refer to a great extent to the guidelines for the exams which all the teachers should be familiar with.

Finally in Chapter 9 I sum up and make some conclusions regarding my research questions. I also look into what we can expect from the final written exam in the future. The focus and priorities in this study are limited to my interests and personal judgement, and restricted by the scope of a thesis of this kind.

## **2. The state of the art**

### **2.1 The syllabus of 1997**

One of the main objectives of this thesis was to study the implementation of the final written exam in the lower secondary school according to the syllabus L97. With the introduction of a new syllabus, the final exam usually undergoes certain changes, and that was also the case after L97 was put into effect. I will be concentrating primarily on L97 due to the scope of this thesis, but I will also refer to aspects of M87, and look into the main objectives of the new syllabus which is currently being implemented.

Any syllabus will provide a particular representation of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning as an expression of the dominant paradigm or frame of reference of the profession at a particular moment in history (Breen: 1987:157). L97 can be referred to as a Task-Based syllabus which means that the objective gives preference to communicative abilities and learning capability and focuses upon the learner's own experience and awareness of language learning.

In this present section I will focus on elements I find pertinent for the teaching of English in general and for the final written exam in particular. In the objectives for the subject it is stated that English as a subject is relevant seen from the point of view of communication, skills, experience and knowledge. The pupils should among other things use, practise and develop the language in situations that involve as much real communication with others as possible, both in and outside the school (L97 English version: 221).

The introduction of the subject of English in L97 emphasizes the position of the subject in the Norwegian school. One of the major differences between M87 and L97 is that the latter maintains that English as a school subject is not only a subject related to skills, but it is an academic subject as well. The task of enhancing pupils' overall language competence is common to all the language courses. The aims and



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approaches of all the language syllabuses are therefore viewed as being interrelated. First language and foreign language teaching is thus based on a shared view of language, in which foreign language learning is not only viewed as skills training, but also as an educational process, involving socialisation and the development of language awareness and cultural awareness (L97 English version: 237). The new syllabus, which is called 'The knowledge promotion' (K06) also emphasizes that English as a school subject is used both as a tool and as an academic subject.

It is stated that foreign language skills are essential for contact and interaction with other peoples, in a global as well as European perspective. There is an ever-increasing need to be able to communicate in English, whether in private life, in the world of education, or at work. "[...] the general need for broader and better language skills is becoming more immediate" (L97 English version: 237). The same objective was expressed in M87: "[....] there is an increasing need for a command of English at work, in education and in our free time "(M87 English version: 221). L97 points to the fact that pupils gradually become more critical and independent at the lower secondary stage. Hence they should be allowed room to develop many facets of their personalities and develop their own approaches to language learning. The classroom must provide a good learning environment (L97 English version: 238). This is reflected in the final exam as well. The teaching of EFL during the lower secondary school should prepare the pupils for independent and individual work, both on the preparation day and in the way they work with the tasks of the exam.

A new perspective in L97 compared to the previous syllabus was that errors can be seen as signs of learning, and that particular attention is paid to the process whereby the pupils develop their own texts. Pupils' evaluation of their own texts and of the actual work process helps them to gain insight into their own language learning (L97 English version: 238). The test designers have taken this aspect into consideration as they focus mostly on the production of texts at the final exam.

## 2.2 The structure of the subject

### 2.2.1 Encountering the spoken and written language

It is a fact that Norwegian pupils are exposed to the English language every day outside of school. They watch films, series on TV/DVD and they play different games on their computers using English as the operative language. Furthermore they listen to music a lot and they travel to countries where they need English as a lingua franca. One can safely say that the exposure to the English language is substantial. Stephen Krashen introduced his ‘input hypothesis’ claiming that the learner acquires new or more language by being exposed to comprehensible input, and L97 maintains that learning can take place through meaningful input as well as through systematic practice. The role of input in learning was even more emphasized in the 1997-syllabus guidelines, and this applies in particular to the reading of longer texts such as short stories and novels (Simensen 1998:118).

In the syllabus the term ‘encountering the spoken and written language’ is thought of as a way of exploring and experiencing the foreign language by being conscious of the differences between L1 and L2 and be familiar with the characteristics of it. An important issue for pupils is to develop the ability to navigate through English texts on their own, develop text competence and language awareness. L97 provides a detailed list of recommended literary texts mostly by British or American authors. As mentioned above, working with texts is important, and that is also what the pupils are asked to do by using the booklet on their final written exam. The more they have encountered and worked with texts prior to the final exam, the more they may be capable of understanding texts and writing about them.

### 2.2.2 Using the language

Using the language is the core of the subject, both the means and the end: “*pupils learn to use English by using it orally and in writing as listeners, readers, interlocutors and writers*” (L97 English version: 239). To focus on the aspect of

writing, the pupils are supposed to create their own texts even from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and this presents a challenge for the teachers of the first years of primary education. It is essential that pupils throughout their years in compulsory education take an active part in practising the language both orally and in writing. Developing writing competence takes many years, and it is important that teachers are aware of this from the very beginning.

L97 focuses strongly on the use of authentic texts, that is to say texts containing no artificial language that is produced for pedagogic purposes. Communicative approaches to language teaching emphasize exposing second language learners to spoken or written texts that are authentic (Kramsch 2000:185). According to the test designers of the current exam, the concept of language in context and the use of authentic texts are paramount aspects of the exams given from 2000 to 2006. The pupils are asked to explore texts, find meaning in texts, use texts as models for their own texts, express their opinion about texts, and be able to use different genres.

The focus on genres has reached increased attention in the writing of texts in English. The syllabus actually maintains that the pupils may profit from the genre awareness and text competence they have developed in L1 teaching when composing texts in English. The final written exam reflects this when the tasks demand that the pupils write articles, stories, fairy tales, diaries, letters to the editor etc. According to the syllabus the guidelines state that from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade onwards the pupils will encounter texts from different periods and different genres including fairy tales, fables and legends, comic strips, short stories, novels for young people etc. In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade the issue of genre is emphasized again, stating that the pupils in cooperation with others will compose texts in various genres (L97 English verdion:245), and finally in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade the pupils should have the opportunity to work with authentic texts from various periods including short stories, novels, poems, biographies, articles etc. The idea is for the pupils to use texts as models for their own writing, so that when they are asked for a particular genre at the final exam they should be familiar with the

characteristics of that genre. The focus on authentic texts of different length and genre is also emphasized in the new syllabus K06.

### **2.2.3 Knowledge of the English language and its cultural context**

This main area comprises knowledge about the English language and the use of the language. The language as an expression of culture and as communication is emphasized. By learning a foreign language the pupils will learn about countries where this language is spoken, and acquire background knowledge through the language. In addition they also get an insight into their own cultural background. The culture is to be experienced through the texts the pupils encounter and work with. The term ‘culture’ is wide and extensive and language is an element of culture. One of the criteria in the evaluation form for the final exam is: *“Does the pupil demonstrate cultural competence?”* It is also stated in the examiner’s guidelines that one of the aims of L97 is knowledge of English speaking countries, and if asked for in the task, the pupils should show such knowledge. The learning of foreign languages presents pupils with the opportunity to become acquainted with other cultures. Such insight lays the foundations for greater respect and tolerance, contributes to new ways of thinking, and broadens their understanding of their own cultural roots. This gives them a stronger sense of their own identity (L97 English version: 237).

### **2.2.4 Knowledge of one’s own language learning**

This area is an essential part of learning a foreign language, and it has to be taught. Learning a language is a life long process, and the pupils are not fully educated at the end of lower secondary school. The Council of Europe uses the terms ‘self-directed learning’ and ‘learner autonomy’, meaning that we as teachers have to provide our pupils with appropriate learning strategies in EFL. These elements are relevant also for learning in general. The pupils should be allowed to develop their own approaches to language learning, and in cooperation with teachers and fellow pupils,

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they should gain experience of shaping their own language learning. By using the process oriented approach to the writing of English, the pupils' evaluation of their own texts and the actual work process help them to gain insight into their own language learning (L97 English version:238). An interesting point, as noted above, is that errors can be seen as signs of learning, and this is also reflected in the examiner's guidelines for the final written exam. I will deal with this more extensively in Chapter 6 where I discuss the evaluation guidelines for the final exam.

There has been a change in the theories of writing over the last decades, and teachers today should focus less on application of correct grammar, and more on the pupils' ability to convey meaning in a text. It is emphasized that the overall impression of a pupil's response should be most important, and that the starting point of this is the interaction between text comprehension, content, the structure of a text and the language.

## 2.3 Aims and targets of L97

The overall aim of L97 is to develop the pupils' communicative competence. The main teaching principle is the communicative approach, and the teachers should focus on developing the pupils' ability to use spoken and written English. An important aim is to enable them to communicate in English in various situations. The pupils' need to convey a message or express themselves is one of the aims of L97. The most important target of writing is the production of texts. The focus on the importance of an audience is pointed out, and the pupils' texts should be performed or presented to others. The verb '*interact*' is used on several occasions, and an expressed aim in L97 is also to develop pupils' awareness of communicative situations.

New syllabuses lead to new exams, and this may again contribute to changing the work in the classroom, the washback effect. According to Anne-Karin Korsvold, who used to work in the Board of Education, changing the exam is no doubt the strongest

power of change we possess. Do teachers around the country teach for the exam in their daily work in the classroom? This is one of my research questions and I will return to this question in the discussion of the findings of my survey in Chapter 8. Bodil Arnestad concludes in an article that “[...] *It remains to be seen whether the new syllabus will change the practice of the classrooms in a positive direction*” (*Språk og språkundervisning 1/97*, my translation). I will not venture down this particular avenue, but my guess is that this may be a research question for a master’s thesis one day in the future.

## 2.4 Aims and targets of the new syllabus K06

The new syllabus of English, K06, is a comprehensive reform of the complete primary and secondary school system, and the link between the lower and upper secondary school is stronger than before. K06 is structured in terms of three main areas, *the learning of the language, communication and culture, society and literature*. In the learning of the language K06 points at the same aspect as L97, viz the pupils’ insight into their own learning. The main areas of K06 have goals of competence after the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and the goals after the 10<sup>th</sup> grade are:” [...] *to identity essential similarities and differences between L1 and L2 and make use of this in the learning of the language itself*” (*Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2006:98*, my translation).

It is noteworthy, however, that the new syllabus does not make any suggestions of specific texts to read or which material to use, but leaves it up to the teachers of EFL to find the material they find necessary to reach the targets of competence. The way I see it, a consequence may be that teachers will be less dependent on a certain textbook, but will use other sources to find teaching material.

As mentioned above, the implementation of a new syllabus is a far reaching extensive operation, and I assume that many teachers around the country are currently in the process of getting acquainted with the main objectives of K06. The communicative

and meaning-oriented approach to teaching is the prevailing teaching theory of the new syllabus of English as well as of the two previous ones, and one may assume that it will remain the dominant theory for some time yet. The focus on different approaches, strategies and methods is strong, and the pupils will be conscious of how they learn the language and evaluate themselves. One salient issue is the use of digital tools, and how to make these a part of the everyday teaching of English as a school subject. By changing the syllabus, many teachers of EFL will probably have to change their view as to the contents for the subject of English. The importance of English as an international language is emphasized more strongly, and the aspect of English as an academic subject is pertinent as well.

## 2.5 Communicative language teaching (CLT)

In this part of my thesis it is pertinent to look into the prevailing theory of the teaching of EFL. As mentioned above, the communicative and meaning-oriented approach to teaching has been most influential over the last two decades. Due to the scope of this thesis and my main objectives, I will point at the issues relevant for this thesis. The communicative approach is characterized by the focus on comprehension and meaning. There is an emphasis on the ‘message’, and on providing opportunities for real communication in L2, inside as well as outside the classroom (Simensen 1998:113). According to Simensen the target language is viewed as a vehicle of meaningful communication. At least two parties are involved in communication and the use of the language is intentional. The practice of the language as a whole is usually emphasized in CLT as opposed to the practice of separate skills and definite language categories in other teaching methods (Simensen 1998: 114). This issue complies with the objectives of the syllabus of L97 as well as of the intention of the final written exam. It is emphasized clearly in the guidelines for evaluation that the exam paper should be regarded as a whole, and I will discuss this issue more in detail in Chapter 6.

There has been a shift in paradigm over the last decades, and the most important change was to focus on actively communicating in and using the target language, instead of learning about a language. An example of this is the fact that teachers of EFL today are much more conscious of using the target language in class, and it is also stressed in the syllabus that most classroom communication should be in English (L97 English version:238). The teaching of writing was also, as part of this process, influenced by communicative language teaching, and new writing pedagogy was gradually developed, e.g. the process oriented approach, which I will address in Chapter 5.

The test designers of the final exam according to L97 were concerned about the fact that the pupils should encounter tasks which were as close to real life as possible and the importance of language in context was emphasized. The concept of studying language in context was first introduced by the American anthropologist and sociologist Dell Hymes. Language competence is, according to Hymes, more than linguistic competence. Social, situational as well as cultural competence should be used in communication (Hymes in Simensen 1998:79). The intention of the tasks of the final written exam was that language should be displayed within a setting, and I will address this issue in Chapter 7 where I will describe the exams given from 2000 to 2006.



### **3. The rationale behind the introduction of the exam**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will focus on the rationale behind the introduction of this exam. I will also look into the development of the exam, and find out what the test designers think about the status of the exam today. My primary sources are two articles written by Anne-Karin Korsvold who was one of the original test designers of this exam, and an interview I had with one of the current test designers, Liv Handal. Furthermore, I use different circulars about the written exam published by the Board of Education.

Centrally set examinations in Norway are the responsibility of the Norwegian Board of Education. The final written exam in English for the lower secondary school had for many years been following the same pattern. The students have been presented with a number of tasks at the day of the exam, tasks containing grammar and comprehension in addition to an essay. The only study facility they were allowed to use was a dictionary. The students had no idea as to the contents of the tasks on beforehand, and had to write whatever they could in the time allotted. With the school reform of 1997, the educational establishment in Norway decided to change the form of the written exam for the lower secondary school. The listening part was removed from the written exam (*Informasjon/Gr-97-003*) which then would consist of two parts, a written test and free writing. The biggest change according to L97 was that it was decided to have a day for preparation, and that the students were given a booklet to read. At the appointed time, the students were informed about their final exam subject, and at the same time the booklets were to be handed out to them. The texts in the booklet were meant as a pre-writing activity and the pupils were supposed to bring the booklets home to study, and meet at school the next day for the preparation day. The first exam after this model was carried through in May 2000.

The point of departure for the written test was authentic texts built around one specific theme. The texts were gathered in a booklet (*Information SUE/Gr-97-006*). Since then several directives have been sent out, and modifications and changes have been made. The main target of the exam is stated clearly : “*The written exam in English will give the students the opportunity to show to what extent they understand and can use written English according to the aims of L97*” (*Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver våren 2005:9* -my translation).

### 3.2 The construct

With the onset of this exam, a committee was appointed by the Board of Education to design the exam and to decide what targets they should test. The committee studied L97 thoroughly to find out which targets were to be tested in the final written exam in English. According to Korsvold’s article from a speech held at a conference in 2001 good exam questions have the following characteristics:

*“Language competence should be displayed within a setting. The pupil’s competence is to be applied in what the central guidelines call ‘situations, tasks and approaches to problems that are close to real life’.*

*Good exam questions or tasks should be open-ended, and the pupils should be free to choose their own approach and how deeply they would treat the subject matter.*

*The questions are to be designed so that the so-called overall competence or comprehensive competence of the pupils can be assessed.*

*It is an important principle not to construct ‘easy’ or ‘difficult’ tasks, but tasks that will give the pupils opportunity to answer well or less well and not correct or wrong” (Korsvold 2001:88).*

This line of thinking was quite different from previous exams. (See the section about the targets and aims of L97). The exam is divided into two parts, Part A: Read and Relate, consisting of several “open” tasks where the pupils may choose mostly

between two alternatives. Part A aims at testing reading skills, and has reading and understanding of texts as the main target. Part B: Free writing, aims at testing writing skills, and has the use of the English language in free production as the main target.

### 3.3 The rationale behind the introduction of booklet

The topics of the booklets vary from year to year and are intended to appeal to young people. The booklets contain texts and illustrations about the topic of the year in a variety of genres and provide students with ideas and input they can put to use during the actual exam. In the booklet the texts are attractively presented. It has an appealing lay -out and it contains for example short stories, articles, cartoons and some adverts. It also contains several pictures and paintings and the tasks given may also relate to these. The thought behind the choice of topic is that it should not be taken from any textbook, and be independent of these. The topics should reflect relevant topics in our daily lives, and be about young people, different countries and people, traditions, culture, communication etc. On a par with L97 and its focus on authentic texts, the booklets contain texts from different periods in the history of literature, classic literature and more recent literature as well as current texts. The idea was that the final written exam should reflect the demand for text competence according to L97, and that the pupils should be able to demonstrate and build on the text competence they already had obtained by studying the booklet.

As a consequence the booklet was to be handed out to the pupils on the day before the preparation day to give them a chance to read and prepare themselves at home. As a corollary the tasks on the day of the exam proper should have the texts in the booklet as a point of departure. According to Korsvold, the Board of Education has collected feedback from pupils and teachers to the effect that the tasks on the day of the exam proper are close to the booklet, hence the pupils are aware of the fact that studying the booklet closely will be an advantage (*Språk og Språkundervisning* 2/2204:2).

At this point I believe it is pertinent to refer to a survey carried out by the Board of Education in 2000. In the article referred to above Korsvold points to a survey carried out among pupils who had passed their final exam in English. They were asked to give their opinions and relate to different statements about the booklet. The idea was that the pupils who participated should be a representative selection. About 1600 pupils participated, and the statements were connected to the booklet of 2000. The pupils were asked to what extent they found it easy to familiarize themselves with the content of the booklet, and the results showed that only 1.7% of the pupils passing their final exam in English claimed that they had great difficulties with the booklet. That equals 400 pupils nationwide (*Språk og språkundervisning* 2/04). To my knowledge, such a survey has not been carried out in recent years, and it would be interesting to know what a similar survey would show today. The number of pupils claiming to have problems with the booklet is not alarmingly high, but nevertheless, these pupils are entitled to extra help to facilitate the reading and comprehension of the booklet. All the texts of the booklet are recorded on a CD which may be used on the preparation day.

### 3.4 The preparation day

Whenever a new reform is put into force, a number of parties are involved in the process. The test designers, the school authorities, the administration at the different schools, the teachers and last but not least the pupils will be influenced by the implementation of a new reform. The test designers do an important job, assigned to them by the Department of Education, Research and Church Affairs. When they have accomplished their assignment it is time to try out the new exam model in the schools all over the country. In the case of L97 we had some trial rounds with the exam in 1998 and 1999, and then from 2000 the new model came into force.

With the onset of a new practice it is of vital importance that the parties involved feel that they have the necessary knowledge and information to fulfil their role in the process. Information circulars were sent out to schools all over the country, and the

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administration of the schools had the responsibility to inform their teachers about the new procedures. The Board of Education wrote in a circular in 1999 that the pupils are expected to meet at school on the preparation day, and that the school, read principal, is responsible for organizing time for teachers and pupils to work together this day. At the outset, there was some frustration on the part of principals and teachers as to whether they could actually demand that the pupils should attend school this day. There seemed to be an impression that many pupils, who definitely would benefit from working with the booklet, failed to show up because it was optional. Later on there was a change, making the preparation day mandatory. “The preparation day is a school day with mandatory attendance” (*Circular LS-37-2003:2*).

### 3.5 Study facilities

On the day the pupils are informed of their exam subject they receive both the booklet and a memo sheet to use at the exam. On the memo sheet the pupils may write notes pertaining to the topics in the booklet. They bring both the memo sheet and the booklet home to work with them. On the preparation day the pupils work with the booklet at school, guided by their teacher. In (*Directive LS-67-02, third paragraph*) it is also stated that the students can use all the study facilities they think they need, and which can be of use to them. The intention from the educational authorities was that the possibility of having several study facilities should reduce exam nerves and keep up the learning process throughout the exam day. These include copies of grammars from textbooks, dictionaries and pupil’s books. The pupil’s book is meant to be a pedagogical tool in the process of learning, and it should be a result of what the individual student has worked with during the learning of English. This book implies that the pupils write to learn. It is supposed to be the pupils’ own product, and the idea is for them to experience that they can apply it and thus activate earlier knowledge on the actual exam.

The memo sheet was introduced as a study facility for the pupils.

*“During the work with the booklet, the pupils should take notes by using keywords, brain maps, ideas, points of view, questions and ways of presenting a problem that turn up in the discussions. On the preparation day the pupils can use as many rough copy drafts as they wish, but they are only allowed to bring the one A4 sheet carrying the school’s official stamp to the exam. This memo sheet will have to be in handwriting or written on a computer, and the pupils may use a dual page. It is important that the pupils write notes, and not cohesive text. The aim of the memo sheets is to be of use for the pupils on the day of the exam, but be aware however of the fact that the processes going on during reading, conversation and reflections may be equally important” (LS-37-2003, my translation).*

I will comment further on this study facility later on, in connection with the survey I have carried out among teachers.

### 3.6 The teacher’s role

According to the Board of Education there were a lot of questions from teachers and schools in the first years of the introduction of this exam. A number of teachers felt that they were feeling their way around on the preparation day. In the first directive there were no specific guidelines for the teachers (*Infomasjon SUE/Gr-97-006*). As a result of this, circulars were sent out to clarify the teacher’s role on the preparation day stating that the teachers should organize the preparation work at school, and that the principal should ensure that this takes place. That way all the pupils will have the same right to help and guidance. *“The teacher will be there to motivate, inspire, guide, answer questions, and maybe ask questions to help students in their work”* (*Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver i grunnskolen våren 2005*, my translation). As noted above the pupils are allowed to use the study facilities on the preparation day and at the actual exam.

In my experience there are differences between schools and English teachers when it comes to the practice of the preparation day. Thus a major part of my thesis is to carry out a survey precisely on this point among my fellow English teachers in the area where I live. One of the statements in the survey is: “In my experience the

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English teachers at my school have similar practice when it comes to the preparation day.” I will return to the findings of this survey in Chapter 8.

There have been some changes and modifications in the instructions since the first directives, and the teachers’ role today is probably more clarified than it was when they first introduced this exam model. Their role, as described in the current instruction is to be present as advisers and guide the pupils. However, they are not going to teach. The main issue on the preparation day is to encourage the pupils to find various approaches to the texts in the booklet and search for additional information. The pupils are encouraged to encounter the texts together with others, to explore the texts, ask questions, give opinions and interact in order to be as prepared as possible for the tasks they will meet at the exam proper the next day. The instruction for the examiners from 2005 states that: *“It’s the product of the day of the exam proper which is to be assessed, but this test is a natural extension of the preparation day where the pupils have had the opportunity to exploit their ability of communication and their learning –to-learn competence”* (Sensorrettleing *Avgangsprøva i Engelsk 2005* -My translation.). The introduction to the current national curriculum (L97) states that the main goal is that children, young people and adults should learn to face the tasks of life and to surmount difficulties together with others. At this stage of the development, the fact that the pupils are given preparation time – as in real life – and the possibility to work with others, contributes to meeting the requirements in this goal of the curriculum (Korsvold 2001:91).

### 3.7 The parts of the written exam

When this exam came into force, the intention was that all pupils should have a fair chance of accomplishing something. The exam is constructed so that the pupils may choose between different tasks, and that they can in fact omit what they may find too difficult. The thought is that pupils who are weak in English should be able to have something to write about, and not get stuck on a task they think is too difficult for them. Provided they have read and understood the booklet, every pupil should be able

to answer the tasks in part A. The first task in part A is always a task to get the pupils started and to remind them of the texts in the booklet. I will give a detailed description of the tasks in Part A in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Part B as noted above, is called “Free writing” and the pupils have to choose one out of six to seven tasks. As stated in the instruction the pupils should write from two to four pages. They are recommended to look in the booklet for ideas and inspiration when they plan their writing. A question in my survey is whether the teachers actually experience that the pupils benefit from studying the booklet, and whether this is reflected in the texts they write. I will comment on this point in chapter 8 where I discuss the findings of my survey. This part of the exam is a time allotted test, and the pupils are advised to use most of their time on Part B.

### 3.8 Assessment of the final exam according to L97

According to Korsvold the challenge of the Board of Education when producing the exam questions has been “to make the most important measurable” and “not the easily measurable most important”. A salient question with the implementation of a new exam model is the issue of validity and reliability in assessment and testing. I will discuss these terms in Chapter 6 where I will deal with assessment and testing. These issues are of great importance when a new exam model is introduced, because the focus on the construct will be strong (see point 3.2 above).

To ensure reliability the test designers have divided the examiners into nine different regions. Every region has their own appointed leader, and the examiners in a region will work closely together and discuss the texts. There are always two different examiners who assess every pupil’s text, and at an appointed date they meet and discuss the pupils’ answers. In cases of discrepancy, there is a third part who decides the outcome and the final grade. There is also a Preliminary Examination close to the day of the actual exam. The intention is among other things to discuss the tasks of the exam, how the individual tasks have turned out, i.e. which tasks have been chosen by



a lot of pupils, which have not, and to work together on the assessment of the responses from a selection of the pupils. There is a strong focus on the fact that the examiners' assessments are based on personal judgement, and that this judgement should be developed by experience and dialogue with colleagues. Thus the individual judgement may be given a professional quality. I will return to the role of the examiner in a later section.

### 3.9 The perspective today

According to the test designers and the feedback they get from teachers and examiners, it seems like this exam has developed in a positive way. The reports from the head of the examiners in the different regions also give evidence to that effect. An important part of my thesis is the questionnaire to teachers in my region asking them to respond to several statements about the exam. I also set out to find out if the teachers in my survey feel they are comfortable with the procedures by now. As mentioned above, one matter is what the test designers have intended, another is what actually happens in the average classroom. The intention of this exam was for the teachers to regard the exam as the end of a three year course. The pupils should be familiarized with the exam from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade onwards, and get accustomed to reading texts and relate to them. The booklets should not be introduced to the pupils for the first time in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

The idea was to use parts of the tasks for tests from the onset of the lower secondary school. Thus the teachers can pick out texts from the booklet and use for reading practice, and then use parts of the tasks accordingly. Similarly, elements of the evaluation criteria in the examiner's form may be picked out and used for instance in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Furthermore, more criteria may be introduced in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and finally in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade the full form will be used. That way the pupils will gradually know exactly which criteria they will be assessed by. The 'washback' effect applies here. This means that pupils as well as teachers tend to study examinations given in preceding years in order to find out what aspects of the school subject are likely to be

measured (Simensen 1998:268). What remains very clear is that the teachers play an important role in the preparation of this exam. A salient question then is whether the teachers in general feel that they have sufficient knowledge and information about the exam. As an English teacher in the lower secondary school I know that the resources for educating the teachers in exam procedures are limited and this may be an area where there is a lot to gain.

## 4. Read and Relate

This chapter is devoted to the teaching of reading and reading comprehension. The final exam according to L97 tests the reading as well as the writing competence of the pupils. However, I will restrict my study to the issue of the teaching of reading. Part A in the exam is called 'Read and Relate'. I gave an extensive description of the parts of the exam in Chapter 3. The booklet, handed out to the pupils prior to the exam, is part of the exam. The general idea is that the pupils should be able to make use of the booklet and find information and get ideas in order to answer the tasks in Part A. Furthermore, the texts in the booklet are meant to serve as an inspiration for the pupils and motivate them to write about the topic.

The focus on the use of authentic texts is strong in L97 as well as in the booklets used at the final exam. For purposes of the foreign language classroom, an authentic text is one whose primary intent is to communicate meaning. In other words, such a text can be one which is written for native speakers of a language to be read by other native speakers or it may be a text intended for a language learner group. The relevant consideration here is not for whom it is written but that there has been an authentic communicative objective in writing it (Swaffar 1985:17).

In our daily lives we face different kinds of reading which we need to master in order to accomplish what we set out to do. We read for pleasure, and we read to educate ourselves. We read the newspaper to get informed about the world around us, we read letters and publications we receive in the mail, and perhaps we read some directions for an electrical installation or a piece of furniture we have bought in a cardboard box. In order to put it together correctly, we need to understand the directions, otherwise we may be left with some extra screws that don't fit in. Thus, for our pupils reading comprehension is of vital importance to succeed both at school and outside of school.

The final exam in English in the lower secondary school also requires that the pupils are able to read adequately to be able to respond to the given tasks. Hayes emphasizes the importance of reading as a central process in writing, and discusses three types of reading that are essential in writing. The first of these is ‘reading to evaluate’, in which the writer reads his or her text critically to detect possible problems and to discover potential improvements. Two other kinds of reading that are involved in writing are ‘reading source texts’ and ‘reading instructions’. Since writing tasks are frequently based on source texts, there is an obvious relationship between the ability to understand the source text and the ability to use information from the text in one’s writing (Hayes 1996 in Weigle 2000:26-28). The ability to understand the task instruction is of great importance when it comes to the tasks of the final exam. If some pupils misunderstand the instructions of a task they may of course not be able to answer the task properly.

With the objective of the final exam and the use of booklet in mind salient questions to ask with regard to the issue of reading are: How do the pupils read the texts? What kind of strategies do they use? Have they acquired the necessary practice and strategies to read a text booklet of about 20 pages, and process the contents? Does the current final exam favour good readers? These questions are not part of my research questions, but in my opinion they are relevant with regard to the reading of the booklet, and I will address these questions in this chapter and in Chapter 8 where I discuss the findings of my survey. My focus will be on the teaching of reading in the lower secondary school in general and in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in particular. There is a lot of research going on currently in schools in Norway concerning pupils’ reading skills. The textbooks we use in different subjects often contain large amounts of text, and to several pupils it is a huge challenge to read these texts and process the information they get. The reason why this is difficult is often that they have not acquired the necessary strategies to read and understand what they read.

As teachers we try to encourage our pupils to read extensively both in Norwegian and English. Reading for pleasure is an activity which has lost ground over the last years,

and young people today spend less time reading compared to the time they spend on their computers, in front of the TV or listening to music on iPods or MP3 players. A lot of young people today prefer other activities to reading, and consequently the reading ability is at a low level. Substantial linguistic research also shows that reading is of vital importance in order to enhance the pupils' writing skills, and our task as teachers of EFL is to convey this message to the pupils and encourage them to read more.

## 4.1 The process of reading in EFL

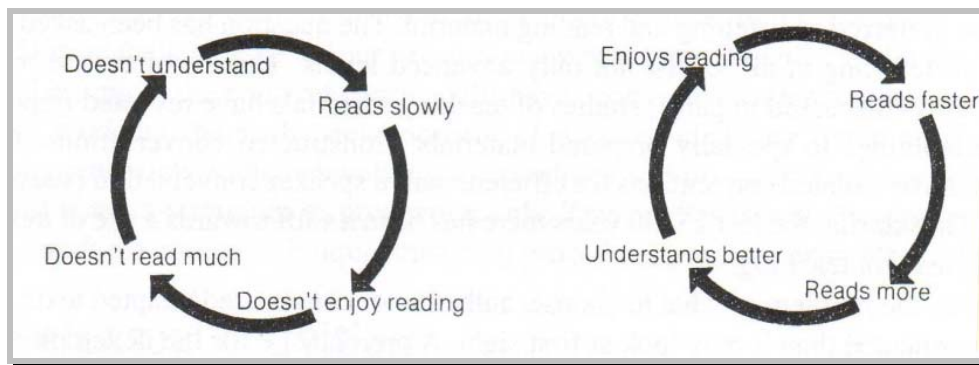
One important prerequisite for successful reading is the reader's motivation to read. As teachers we can help motivating our pupils, and we should provide the pupils with the necessary reading strategies to enable them to comprehend the content and enhance the reading experience. Alderson, one of the world's experts in the field of reading assessment, brings out the issue of the nature of reading in a second or foreign language. The question is whether the ability to read transfers across languages. Alderson asks whether a good first-language reader is also a good second-language reader (Alderson 2000:23). My immediate personal response to this question is that such a transfer exists. A pupil who has difficulties in reading his first-language will, in my opinion, have difficulties reading in a second-language as well. However, an interesting question is whether second-language reading is a language problem or a reading problem. Clarke's 'short-circuit' hypothesis posits that inadequate knowledge of the second language short-circuits or prevents successful first-language readers from reading well in the second language (Clarke in Alderson 2000:38). According to Alderson there is likely to be a language threshold beyond which second-language readers have to progress before their first-language reading abilities can transfer to the second-language situation (Alderson 2000.23).

At this point it is pertinent to bring forth the distinction between *extensive* and *intensive* reading. According to Bamford and Day extensive reading is generally associated with reading a large amount of text with the aim of getting an overall

understanding of the material. Readers should be more concerned with the meaning of the text than the meaning of individual words or sentences. On the other hand, intensive reading often refers to the careful reading (or translation) of shorter, more difficult foreign language texts with the goal of complete and detailed understanding. Intensive reading is also associated with the teaching of reading in terms of its component skills (Bamford and Day 1997:1).

The more the pupils have practised reading the more it will have a positive effect on their reading comprehension skill and also on the outcome of the exam itself.

Christine Nuttall has portrayed two possible developments in connection with L2 reading; the vicious circle and the virtuous circle:



*Figure 4.1 The vicious circle of the weak reader and the virtuous circle of the good reader*

In my opinion these circles illustrate the reality of the situation we have to deal with as teachers of EFL. It may be very difficult to transfer pupils from the vicious to the virtuous circle. When pupils start at the lower secondary school they may be convinced that they are poor readers, and that reading is no fun. Thus it takes a lot of effort and encouragement on the part of the teacher to convince them otherwise. By and large it may be safe to maintain that pupils who identify themselves with the virtuous circle will benefit more from the work with the booklet, than those who identify with the vicious circle.

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## 4.2 Bottom-up versus top-down models

A large amount of research has been carried out on reading, and the discussion of this research addresses the cognitive processes that are involved in skilled reading. Two different approaches have been the subject of much research over the last twenty years, namely the 'bottom-up approach' and the 'top-down approach'. Bottom-up approaches are serial models, where the reader begins with the printed word, recognises graphic stimuli, decodes them to sound, recognises words and decodes meaning (Alderson 2000:16). Put in other words, the reader starts with the smallest unit, the letters, put them together in words, and reads word by word and sentence by sentence. This approach is associated with behaviourism in the 1940s and 1950s, and builds on the notion that children need to recognize letters before they can read words.

The top-down approach however, postulates that the reader starts with a general idea, or a schema, of what the text is about (Simensen 1998:87). With top-down processing the uptake of information is guided by the pupil's prior knowledge and information. Schema theory holds that, when appropriate schemata are activated as we read, they facilitate comprehension and shape our expectations about what is to come. In this view, readers activate what they consider to be relevant existing schemata and map incoming information onto them. Schema theory is based on a series of empirical studies which show that the background information facilitates as well as influences the comprehension and memory of texts (Simensen 1998:88).

## 4.3 Text comprehension

From the very first time we learn to read we experience that words have meaning. Reading comprehension is dependent on an interaction between the reader and the text. I will in this section refer to Simensen 1998. Reading as a comprehension skill is the ability to decode written symbols. A number of Norwegian pupils might find it difficult to read some English words because there is a lack of correspondence

between the writing system and the sound system (Simensen 1998:154). The general impression is that pupils in the lower secondary school today know a lot of English because they are exposed to the language to a large extent every day, as mentioned above.

According to Simensen we often distinguish between three basic levels of text comprehension:

*“an understanding of the surface meanings of the text, the plain or factual sense of the text, an understanding of implications and ‘between the lines’ meaning, and an understanding which makes it possible to evaluate the text on the basis of personal knowledge and experience”* (Simensen 1998:141).

With regard to the final exam the 3<sup>rd</sup> level applies to a great extent, since the tasks of the exam require that the pupils will have to reflect and discuss and express their own opinions about different issues. Thus text comprehension is a highly relevant question concerning the use of the booklets.

## 4.4 Formal schemata and content schemata

Alderson maintains that what readers know affects what they understand, and when readers process text, they integrate the new information from the text into their pre-existing schemata. Furthermore, the schemata influence how the readers recognize and store information (Alderson 2000:33). With regard to reading in the lower secondary school and in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in particular, it is essential to focus on how the pupils read and comprehend, and how they process the information they acquire from reading. Alderson distinguishes between **formal schemata** and **content schemata**. By formal schemata we understand the knowledge of the language and linguistic conventions, including how texts are organized and what the main features of particular genres are (Carrell 1983 in Alderson 2000:34). Linguistic knowledge continues to develop with age and experience, and in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade our pupils should



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have reached a certain threshold of language knowledge. However, the extent of their knowledge depends on several factors e.g. reading strategies, vocabulary knowledge and the amount of texts they have read before.

On the other hand the content schemata refer to the fact that readers need knowledge about the content of a passage to be able to understand it. Alderson points out that such knowledge does not simply have to be available; it needs to be activated by the reader. Studies have shown that readers can learn how to activate their own schemata and thus improve their reading skills ( Alderson 2000:43). This is certainly an area in need of further research among teachers of EFL.

**Knowledge of the subject matter/topic.** As readers we often find it easier to read about topics we are familiar with, and that is also of course the case with our pupils. What readers know affects what they understand (Alderson 2000:33). With regard to the texts of the booklets at the final exam, an extract from one of the books about Harry Potter will probably be easy to process because most pupils have pre-existing knowledge about the contents from watching one or more of the films, or reading the books. Likewise, reading about famous people like the Beckhams in the booklet will also activate relevant schemata with most pupils. According to Alderson reading is successful when the schemata are relevant. Furthermore, readers may spend less time on the words “wedding cake” in a sentence than “a large cake”, because they presumably knows what a wedding cake looks like. Conversely, when we as readers do not have a schema that corresponds to that of the text we are reading it makes comprehension more difficult. The problem then is that we do not properly see the relevance of the events etc. described in the text (Simensen 1998:88). Furthermore, poor readers will benefit if they have knowledge about the text or passage they read. This knowledge needs to be activated by the reader.

**Knowledge of the world** is also a factor affecting reading, and it has an impact on text processing. Put in another way, knowledge of the world comprises that the reader knows what rules and regulations apply in a society, universal laws and simply how the world as the reader knows it works.

**Cultural knowledge.** The more the readers know about their own and other cultures the more they will comprehend. The textbooks for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade contain texts about other cultures, and the pupils are for example supposed to learn about Native Americans as well as the Aborigines in Australia. The booklets used at the final exam also contain texts which require that the pupils have cultural knowledge. To illustrate this I will include some examples below:

Year	Topic	Title	Content
2000	We are the world, we are the future	Fidel Castro talks to the World Health Organization (WHO)	A speech made by Castro about the social conditions in the industrial world, and in the third world.
2003	People's lives	Thoughts of home	An extract from a book about life as a child in Somalia written by a woman who today is a UN special ambassador fighting FGM - female genital mutilation.
2005	Challenges	Whale Rider	A legend about the Maori people from New Zealand.

*Table 4.1 Illustration of texts which require cultural knowledge*

The texts mentioned above may be difficult to process for pupils who have limited cultural knowledge.

**Knowledge of genre/text type.** Another area where pupils benefit from extensive knowledge is with regard to genre. The key issue is to know where to look for the main idea in a paragraph or a text. The way I see it this must be taught, and we often assume that our pupils know more than they do when it comes to identifying important information in a text and process it. The issue of genre awareness applies here, and pupils who have worked a lot with the different genres they may encounter at the final exam, may find it easier to recognize and identify typical features of a certain genre. Our pupils in the lower secondary school have for several years worked with different genres in Norwegian as a school subject, but the emphasis on the use of different genres in English as a school subject has not been equally strong. However, after the implementation of L97 the focus on genres in English has been stronger,

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especially with regard to the final exam. One salient question is whether the teachers of EFL take this into consideration in their teaching of writing in English.

## 4.5 Good readers, poor readers

Furthermore, a relevant question is what skills are required by good readers in order to process text efficiently. My impression is that there has been too little focus on reading strategies in the primary school and in the lower secondary school. There has been a lot of theories about the teaching of reading for the youngest pupils and how to teach L1 reading in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. However, when the pupils grow older, and are supposed to read longer and more complicated texts, they seem to lack the necessary strategies for acquiring the information they are looking for.

As mentioned above, the construct of the final exam of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is assessing writing and reading. If that was not the case, there would not be any need to compose and distribute a booklet prior to the exam. A salient question is whether this exam favours good readers. In order to address that question, it might be useful to focus on what a good reader is and I will look into some of the criteria which, according to linguistic research, characterize good readers. What distinguishes good from poor readers is not the numbers of letters in an eye fixation, nor the number of words fixated per page, but the speed of the fixation – the automaticity of word recognition – and the processes that occur during fixation (Alderson 2000:18). Furthermore, the ability to recognize words rapidly and accurately is an important predictor of reading ability. Good readers have acquired reading strategies, and they are able to bring metalinguistic knowledge to the texts they read. This means that though there may be a word or words in a sentence they don't understand, they may still comprehend the context and even make a guess as to the meaning of a word. Good readers also have more persistence when they read, and they don't use too much energy stumbling on words they don't understand.

A typical characteristic of a good reader is the extent of vocabulary he/she knows. The more words and chunks of words a pupil has acquired, the more it facilitates the reading. Research by Laufer (1989) and Liu and Nation (1985) shows that readers need to know 95% of the words in a text to gain adequate comprehension and to be able to guess unknown words from context (Alderson 2000:35). To support the assertion above, it may be safe to say that pupils who have an extensive vocabulary stand a much better chance of enjoying reading and comprehend what they read. According to Alderson, good readers activate a schema before reading a text, poor readers do not. Competent readers will to a greater extent be able to find the gist of a paragraph or a text, and be more concerned with the comprehension of a text, than of decoding words and phrases.

Poor readers, however, lack good reading strategies, and have little or no metalinguistic knowledge. They will stumble on words, and have their comprehension impaired. They may have trouble with words they know in spoken English, but don't recognize in the written form. Words like e.g. 'actually' or 'disgusting' are words that probably belong to the pupils' passive vocabulary, meaning that they understand the words when they hear them, but they do not know how to write them or recognize them in a written text. Poor readers also have a limited persistence when it comes to reading texts of a certain length. Some texts in the booklets are long; one text from 2004 was up to three or more A4 pages. Poor readers may be discouraged by this.

## 4.6 The reading of the booklet

The idea of handing out the booklet on the day before the preparation day was that it might enable the pupils to study the booklet thoroughly, to use various strategies, to activate schemata, to acquire e.g. knowledge of subject matter, and of genres. Furthermore they have ample time to use dictionaries and to write down key information on their memo sheets. In addition to reading the booklet and preparing for the writing, the idea was also that the pupils would know what topic to expect in

order to make them more comfortable and eliminate some of the anxiety before the exam.

I dealt with the use of memo sheets at the final exam in Chapter 3. A salient question is in my opinion how the pupils read the booklet. One of my research questions is whether the booklet serves as an inspiration or a source of problems, and I believe that both may be the case. Simensen brings up the issue of ‘real life expectations’ meaning that people normally have expectations about the texts they listen to or read. These expectations are a product of previous knowledge and experience (Simensen 1998:140). This is in line with the schema theory which I have touched upon above.

An important question with regard to reading is whether the pupils should read for pleasure or for a particular piece of information. The term ‘*pretextual activities*’ relates to the topic of the text to be read or listened to and are meant to be used before reading (Simensen 1998:143). The pupils know that there will be activities to do after reading the texts, thus they should make sure that they use the appropriate reading strategies and acquire the information they need in order to answer the tasks. The test designers’ intention was that the booklet should serve as a stimulus for the pupils, motivate them to write, and give them ideas. An interesting point is, however, that research shows that this is not necessarily the case, and that writers who were given a text tended to develop their ideas less than students who were not given a text, and also tended to rely heavily on the language of the source text (Lewkowicz in Weigle 2000:68). Weigle concludes that this is an area where more research is needed, and whether the booklet will be used as stimulus material in the years to come is unknown at this point.

The structure with a booklet as a pretextual activity is currently being implemented in the upper secondary school as well, and it is of interest for teachers in the lower secondary school to find out what kind of experiences they have gained there. Anne Ely Thorenfeldt touches upon this issue in her master’s thesis about the exam in the R’94 vocational courses, and she maintains that good readers may profit from reading a booklet in advance while poor readers will more or less regard this as a

disadvantage. Furthermore, Thorenfeldt claims that poor readers are more often than not poor writers as well, and finding the essence of a text for making good notes is, in her experience, far beyond their capacity. Finally, she concludes that the preparation sessions the way they are practised in the vocational courses add to increasing the gap between the good and less proficient readers (Thorenfeldt 2005:59). With the implementation of a new syllabus, which is the case at the moment, the link between the lower and upper secondary school is getting stronger, and thus it is even more important to know what our pupils will encounter in terms of exams in the upper secondary school. However, the result from Thorenfeldt's analysis may have been different in classes in the general branch of the upper secondary school system where the emphasis on foreign languages is stronger.

## 5. The teaching of writing

In this part of my thesis I will look into the teaching of writing. The testing of writing, which is one of the goals of the final exam, should reflect the teaching of writing. The teaching of writing is a huge area of expertise, and I will only be able to touch upon some issues which I believe will be of relevance to my thesis. New writing pedagogy like the process oriented approach has been used to some extent at the final exam during the last years, and I will look into this at the end of this chapter.

### 5.1 The writing process

The teaching of writing is an ongoing process from the first time the pupils start at school. From the learning of the first letters, to writing the first words, to writing cohesive texts, the pupils have been through a long and complicated process.

Linguists and educational researchers have historically held contradictory positions about the relationship between writing and speaking, implying that the written form of the language is more ‘correct’ and therefore should be more highly valued than oral language (Grabe and Kaplan (1996) in Weigle 2002:15). However, in recent years a consensus has been emerging to reconcile these two positions: neither oral nor written language is inherently superior to the other, but oral and written texts do vary across a number of dimensions, including (but not limited to) textual features, sociocultural norms and patterns of use, and the cognitive processes involved in text production and comprehension (Weigle 2002:15).

It is noteworthy that the syllabus (M87) states that: “*Written work must be adapted to the pupils’ ability to express themselves. It is important that the demands regarding written achievement are differentiated. Simple written tasks include noting messages, writing letters and making up brief dialogues. In the case of some pupils, free written assignments provide good opportunities for using their imagination, describing experiences and expressing opinions*” (M87, English version: 223).

L97 on the other hand, maintains that: *“Pupils will use the language in the production of their own spoken and written texts – text in a broad sense – for presentation and performance... [...] they may find the space they need to freely express themselves in and within the language. Pupils can explore the language, interpret it and use their own imagination”* (L97, English version: 238).

The focus on free writing is much stronger in L97, than in M87, and this is mirrored in the final exam which consists of a Free Writing part with a number of ‘open’ tasks regarding content and genre.

## 5.2 The development of the teaching of writing in EFL

The teaching of writing in EFL has changed in many ways over the last two decades. The focus on free writing started to gain ground with the implementation of L97. Before that writing was often confined to activities like translation, dictation, renarration and copying. Writing at school consisted to a large extent of doing grammar exercises in the workbook, fill-ins and multiple choice tasks were often used, and cloze-tests were applied to test whether the pupils had comprehended the content of a text. Hilde Beate Lia has written her master’s thesis about ‘Some aspects of the Teaching of Writing in English as a Foreign Language’ and she gives a detailed description of the development of the teaching of writing in EFL. She claims that the syllabus of M87 represented an important shift in the history of EFL, and that meaning in general became a key word from M87 onwards. The shift from focus on writing skills where the objectives were correct application of rules of grammar towards the writing of a connected and meaningful text, has changed the teaching of writing in EFL dramatically. Practice of language as a whole as opposed to practice of separate skills is emphasized, and writing was eventually seen as a tool for communication of meaning with the introduction of the communicative approach (Lia 2001:11-12).



As mentioned in Chapter 2, the current dominant theory of EFL is the communicative approach, and the main objective of the teaching is above all communicative competence. One important issue regarding the teaching of writing is the teaching of discourse competence. With regard to the final written exam in English, and the production of texts, this competence is of vital importance. According to Simensen discourse competence is a question of obtaining coherence in thought and cohesion in form. Among other things, it includes an ability to obtain unity and continuity in a written text by organizing ideas in a logical manner and combining them by means of suitable pronouns, conjunctions etc. (Simensen 1998:109). The words ‘coherence’, ‘cohesion’, ‘unity’ and ‘continuity’ show how important it is for us as teachers to teach our pupils how to structure a text. The ability to organize ideas in a meaningful way and to link the different parts of a text together is pertinent with regard to the final written exam. Furthermore, the pupils should know how to divide a text into paragraphs, and in order to do so, they need to know what a paragraph is. In her thesis Lia uses this definition of a paragraph:

*“A paragraph is a group of sentences that develops one central point. A writer often directly states this point in a sentence near the beginning of a paragraph; this statement is called a topic sentence. The writer then develops the topic sentence more fully within the body of the paragraph”* (Bates 1993 in Lia 2001:25).

As mentioned above, the pupils encounter the concept of paragraphs in the tasks at the final exam, and it is very important that they know how to use paragraphs in their texts.

In order to make a text coherent, the pupils also need to learn how to use linking words and phrases to carry over a thought or idea from one sentence to another or from one paragraph to another. This is especially important with many of the tasks at the final exam where the pupils are asked to reflect, discuss or state their own opinions. In the evaluation form used by the examiners at the final exam, one of the

four main areas of evaluation is ‘structure’ of the text. The examiners will assess to what extent these criteria apply:

- Does the text comply with genre requirements, if any?
- Does the text signal awareness of the reader?
- Is the text well organised by means of e.g. titles, paragraphs and syntax?
- Does the pupil make use of linking words and phrases?

I will return to the discussion of the evaluation form in Chapter 6, but I found it appropriate to mention the evaluation criteria regarding the structure of the text at this point.

### 5.3 The cognitive aspects of writing

In the present section I will look closer into the nature of writing and the teaching of writing. The term ‘channel’ in linguistic connection refers to the channel used for communication and the two channels used are the written and the oral. We distinguish between the productive mode which includes writing and speaking, and the receptive mode meaning reading and listening. The first refers to activities which consist of sending information to others in a written or oral manner, and the latter activities which consist of receiving and understanding messages from others by reading or listening. For most people writing is not an easy activity which comes naturally, it has to be taught, and the understanding of the nature of writing may differ considerably from person to person. Thus a pertinent question may be whether anyone can be taught to be a good writer, and whether the methods we use as teachers are sufficient to teach our pupils to be good writers. We have a responsibility to enable our pupils to develop writing skills in L2, and in order to do so we have to build on the knowledge they have already acquired in their native language.

The cognitive processes involved in writing differ in important ways from those used in speaking. The most distinctive implication is that the act of speaking involves the

presence of an addressee who is actually receiving the message exactly the way it is communicated. On the other hand, writers must have a receiver or receivers in mind who are not present, and must construct a coherent message for them. A key word in this connection is 'information', about the audience, about the writing topic and about the appropriate way of communicating the message. It is in fact the ability to anticipate the audience and shape a message appropriately in the absence of a conversation partner that distinguishes expert from inexperienced writers (Weigle 2002:18).

People write for pleasure, some write to put thoughts into words on paper (diary) to express their feelings even though no one is meant to read it. But normally a writer writes for an audience, for a particular purpose. The writing context requires writers to have a sense of the reader's expectations and an awareness of appropriate conventions for a particular part of writing. The pupils encounter these issues at the final exam as well, and it is important that we teach our pupils how to meet such requirements.

## 5.4 What characterizes a good writer?

Research shows that good writers approach the act of writing differently from poor writers. In my experience as a teacher, those pupils who achieve a grade above average (grade 5, 6) spend more time planning their writing e.g. for a term paper or at an exam. On the other hand, poor writers seem to be more concerned with finishing as soon as possible, and they often start writing right away, and are reluctant to revise their work. I believe that we have to stress the importance of the preparation phase for our pupils, and spend more time actually teaching them how to start working on a writing assignment.

A method of looking into this is by using retrospective interviews or think-aloud protocols where writers say aloud their thoughts as they write, allowing the researcher to gain insight into the mental activity and decision-making processes of

the writer as he or she carries out the writing task (Hayes and Flower 1980 in Weigle 2000:22). This line of research indicates that good writers spend more time planning and revising their work than novice writers, and tend to edit their writing for content and organization rather than simply making surface changes to the text. Another important aspect according to Weigle, is that expert writers also take into account their audience. The issue of an audience, or a potential reader is of vital importance in the teaching of reading, and the pupils must be taught how to have the potential reader in mind when writing his/her text.

## 5.5 The influence of reading on writing

Linguistic research shows that there is a significant coherence between reading and the development of writing ability. Reading for pleasure contributes to the development of writing ability in several ways e.g. the expansion of vocabulary. A well known proponent for the positive connection between reading for pleasure and the development of writing ability is Stephen Krashen who claims that second language acquisition in general and the development of writing occur in the same way namely by being exposed to the language to a great extent. He distinguishes between learning and acquisition. The former is a conscious process, whereas the latter is a subconscious process similar to child first language acquisition. According to Krashen acquisition is a far more powerful and central process than learning, and is responsible for our ability to use language in both production and comprehension (Krashen 1984: 21). Krashen maintains that writing ability is not learned but is acquired via extensive reading, in which the focus of the reader is on the message and not on form. The reader will, after having read extensively have acquired knowledge of grammatical structures and discourse rules as well. Rule learning, according to this view, has a limited role in both second language acquisition and in the development of writing ability (Krashen 1984:23).

## 5.6 The process oriented approach to writing

An area which has reached increased attention among Norwegian teachers in lower secondary school over the last two decades is the process oriented approach to the teaching of writing in L1 and eventually in L2. The POW (I will use this abbreviation throughout this section) is also an option at the final exam in written English, thus I find it pertinent to look into this from the point of view of the exam. From my own experience as a teacher I understand that POW has been implemented to a great extent in Norwegian as a school subject both through the lower secondary school, and at the final exam in Norwegian. On the other hand it has not been employed to a great extent in English as a school subject, but there is an increasing tendency to use POW in this subject too. There are no specific figures as to how many pupils who used POW at the final exam e.g. in 2006, and as examiners we do not know which pupils or classes who have employed this method. However, examiners claim that they can recognize the difference between texts following the traditional model and those where POW have been used.

The POW was first introduced in the USA at the beginning of the 1970's and it created a paradigm shift from product to process. Our task today is to encourage and help our pupils to regard writing as a meaningful activity, and to make them understand that the process of writing is equally important as the product.

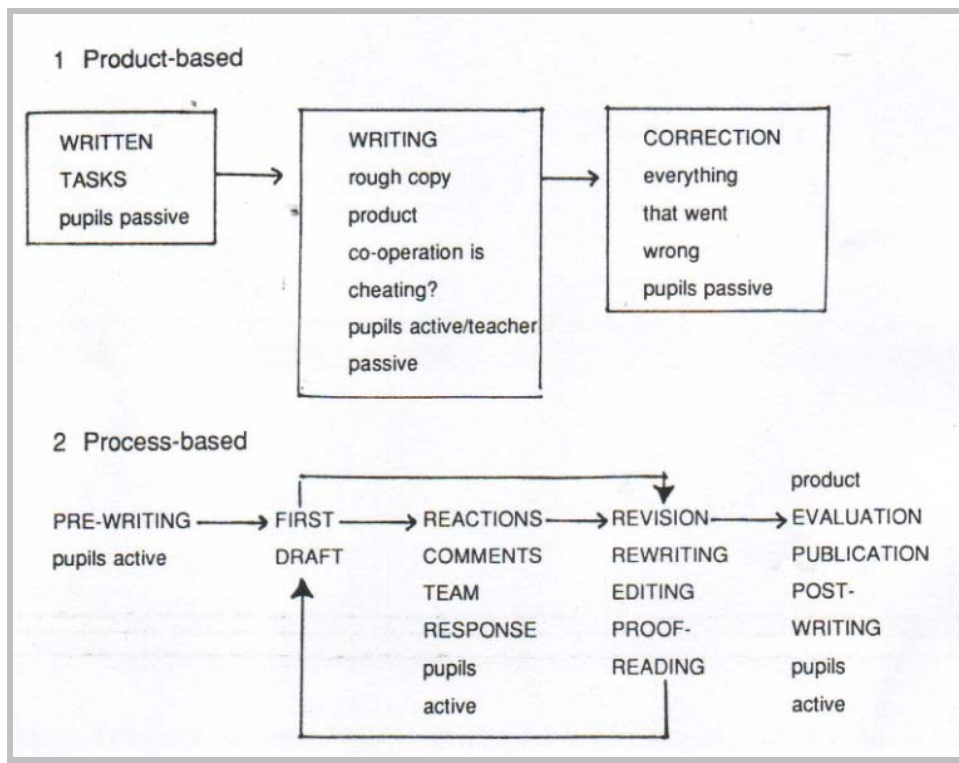


Figure 5.1 Approaches to writing (Drew 1993:17)

This model shows how different the product-based and process-based approaches to writing are. In the product based model, better known as the traditional model, the pupils are left on their own to produce a text, and writing is a solitary activity with little or no input from other people. Whereas in the process based model the pupils are more active participants, and by sharing with other pupils they may also get valuable feedback to improve their own texts. The interaction between pupils and also the teacher makes the writing process more of a creative and generative process, and the pupils get the opportunity to test reader's reaction to their own texts.

A distinctive feature of POW is its initial focus on content and that teaching 'intervenes' at various points in the process, which I will return to below.

Furthermore, a significant characteristic of POW is the importance attributed to cooperation between students during writing (Simensen 1998:206).

The purpose of writing is essential, and the test designers of the exam according to L97 have had this in mind when they have designed the tasks. The pupils encounter tasks which to a large extent are in a setting, also called 'real life' tasks. They are asked to write a letter, or an article, or to give their opinions about a certain topic. The focus on audience is also taken care of in the tasks at the final exam. The pupils are asked e.g. to write a letter to an editor of a magazine, or an article in a youth magazine, or a text to be published for a certain audience.

At all levels of learning, the idea of feedback is valuable. The pupils receive feedback from their teachers at various levels, and this is an ongoing process throughout their school years. However, getting feedback from fellow pupils is quite another matter, and it adds another dimension to the way they regard their own texts. The idea of constructive feedback is educational, and it is valuable both for the pupils giving it, and those who receive it. The role of the teacher is important, and he/she should teach the pupils how to give and receive feedback, and this should be taught from the primary school onwards. Research shows that feedback is more useful when it is done during the writing process than at the end of a written product.

With regard to POW we usually distinguish between three major stages:

- Prewriting and planning: Finding ideas and organizing them
- Writing drafts and revising them: Creating continuous text versions
- Editing: Adhering to conventions for writing

(Simensen 1998:207).

Prewriting comprises all activities and material that help pupils generate ideas before they start writing. The booklet used at the final exam is such a stimulus material, and other material can be listening activities, discussions and film to mention some.

Prewriting activities are activities that are intended to facilitate and stimulate the task of writing. Pupils often struggle to find the content, thus this stage is very important for a successful outcome. The teachers' role is significant, and they must assume a good deal of responsibility for helping their pupils to generate ideas. In my opinion

we have a tendency to overestimate our pupils when it comes to prewriting and planning of a writing assignment. They need much help and guidance from their teacher.

After completing the prewriting and planning stage, it is time to get the ideas down onto paper and write the first draft. The focus is primarily on content, and at this stage the pupils will concentrate on organizing ideas already generated and on writing a continuous text on the basis of an outline of these ideas. An important issue at this stage is also that the pupils should be open to new ideas and add them to the ones they already have. However, structure is a key word here, and the pupils should learn how to add new ideas, and not just write them down impulsively.

In addition to composing a text, this stage also involves revising the pupils' drafts. One salient question to ask when writing a text is: "Who are my readers?" With this in mind the pupils have the opportunity to share their texts with their peers, and give and receive response on their drafts. To my knowledge, the way this is practised in school today is that the teacher divides the pupils into response groups and they read their first drafts aloud in the group and then give each other constructive and appropriate feedback. This should serve to help the writer to clarify ideas and generate new ones. The form of the response may be either oral or in writing, but the most important issue is that the pupils should be open to response, and that they may be willing to change their texts, or elements of their texts according to the response. The teacher should be present and guide and help the pupils, especially since some pupils are not mature enough to function in a response group.

After the response stage, the pupils go back to rewrite or revise their texts on the basis of the response from other pupils. The emphasis of this stage is to reorganize and restructure ideas, and convert the final draft into a text which is in accordance with conventions for writing. The focus is still on content and meaning, but after the first draft the pupils must concentrate on surface-level features such as spelling, punctuation and grammar.



## **6. Assessment and testing of EFL**

One of my main objectives with this thesis was to look more closely into the assessment process of the final written exam in English. Hence, as mentioned before, I signed up as an examiner to experience for myself the process of assessing the final exam. I was especially concerned about the issues of reliability and validity. One of my research questions is to what extent the examiners' task has changed after the implementation of L97. I find it pertinent to devote this chapter to the issue of assessment and testing, and to look into it briefly from a historical perspective. For the purpose of this thesis I will concentrate primarily on the form of assessment and testing of the final written exam, but I will also touch upon assessment from a general point of view.

### **6.1 Assessment and testing in a historical perspective**

Assessment and testing are important issues of our every day life as teachers, and it is an ongoing process. Like other areas of language teaching, there have been changes over the years, and one paradigm has succeeded another. At all times however, it has been of utmost importance to ask what the purpose of testing is. The answer to that may vary, and there are many opinions as to why we have to assess and test our pupils. My impression is that the practices of testing vary considerably, and I will discuss this in the results of my survey (See Chapter 8).

In this section I will look into the most significant trends in assessment and testing of EFL from the previous century up to the current situation. Furthermore, I will define some terms regarding assessment and testing, and my primary source is Aud Marit Simensen's book 'Teaching a foreign language' chapter 10. In the history of L2 testing we distinguish between three main periods or trends. The 'pre-scientific' period or the traditional trend which it is also called was predominant up to the 1950s. The written test types most frequently used were translation, renarration,

dictation and essay-writing. The concept pre-scientific refers to the fact that this method had no basis in testing research. The pre-scientific trend was followed by the ‘discrete-point trend’ in which the ideal was to measure isolated skills and small elements of the target language in separate tests (Simensen 1998:269). The discrete-point trend was dominant in the 1960s and 1970s. The focus was on the small elements of the language, such as phrases and words, and the tests were regarded as reliable because they could be scored objectively.

From the 1980s the paradigm shifted to the ‘communicative and meaning-oriented trend’. After a few decades of a method which was influenced by behaviourism and structuralism, new voices were heard, claiming that language should be measured in context. This trend is still prevalent and influences the way we assess EFL in school today. Aud Marit Simensen has an interesting comparison between the discrete-point trend and the communicative and meaning oriented trend in her book. In the table below we can clearly see the different characteristics of these two trends, and recognize what we today emphasize in our assessment.

<i>Focus on language</i>	<i>Focus on communication</i>
1. Language patterns	Communicative function
2. Objective measurement	Subjective assessment
3. Emphasis on correctness	Emphasis on appropriacy
4. General contexts	Specified contexts
5. Focus on analysis	Focus on synthesis
6. Cognitive manipulations	Performance skills
7. Internal, norm-referenced	External, criterion-referenced
8. Artificial 4-skill tasks	Authentic integrated tasks

*Figure 6.1 Focus on language versus focus on communication in testing (Simensen 1998: 272)*

**Discrete- point testing versus integrative testing.** In the testing of L2 we distinguish between discrete-point testing at one end of the scale and integrative tests on the other. With the communicative and meaning-oriented trend discrete-point

testing lost ground to integrative test types. The focus shifted from testing language skills in separate tests to integrative tests where one focused on assessing a pupil's knowledge by combining the different elements and test them all at the same time. By writing a text, the examiner should be able to assess the pupil's ability to use grammar and vocabulary instead of testing the elements separately. Language competence is a set of interacting abilities which cannot be separated and tested adequately (Brown 1987:228). Thus, integrative tests were seen as a better way of assessing the communicative skills.

**Proficiency testing versus achievement testing.** We distinguish between several ways of testing and the two most common purposes with regard to L2 testing are 'proficiency testing' and 'achievement testing.' Proficiency testing is used to give information about a student's general level of proficiency in e.g. English. There are several well known tests available for example the TOEFL-test (Test of English as a Foreign Language) which may be used by Norwegians who need to document their proficiency in English before studying in an English speaking country. The form of testing used when it comes to the final exam in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is however achievement testing. It's the end of 10 years of compulsory education and the pupils are tested in what they have learnt during this time. Furthermore, achievement testing may be used at various points during a semester or a course. This is called 'formative testing.' On the other hand, achievement testing used at the end of a course is called 'summative testing.' The purpose is to give information in terms of a grade, which will be of importance for the pupil when he/she moves on to upper secondary school.

**Norm referenced testing versus criterion-referenced testing.** There is also a distinction between 'norm-referenced' and 'criterion-referenced testing.' The former aims at discriminating between examinees or test takers in the sense that an examinee's performance is judged in relation to the performance of the others in the same group. The same group may, for example, be all the students taking the final examination in English in the compulsory school system in one specific year (Simensen 1998:266). Final exams are currently criterion referenced both in the

lower and upper secondary school. That is to say that each pupil is assessed individually, without regard to the scores of the other students. In the case of the final exam in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the exam is produced to assess to what extent the objectives of the syllabus in force are obtained.

## 6.2 Reliability, validity and objectivity, important concepts in the testing of EFL

As noted above one of my major concerns regarding testing was the basic concepts in test theory; reliability, validity and objectivity. The reliability of a test is its consistency as an instrument of measurement (Simensen 1998:267). This means quite simply that if a test is carried out on two different occasions with the same or comparable pupils, the result should be the same. The validity of a test is a question of to what extent the test measures what it is intended to measure. In other words, a test is valid when the results reflect the characteristic we want to measure (Simensen 1998:267). If we link this to the current final exam, the intention of the exam is for the pupils to show their overall competence in written English, which is the competence defined by the syllabus in force. The goal of the final written exam according to L97 is to give the pupils an opportunity to show to what extent they understand and are able to use written English.

One of the questions asked in the examiners' final report is precisely whether they think this exam gives the pupils an opportunity to show what they can, or rather if the test measures what it is supposed to measure. For 2005 as many as 23 out of 25 examiners thought that the final exam of 2005 gave the pupils the opportunity to show their written competence of English according to the goals of L97 (*Oppmannsrapport – avgangsprøva i engelsk 2005 for Telemark, Buskerud og Vestfold*). In 2006 there were 30 examiners who participated, and the majority of the examiners agreed that the pupils were able to show their competence in English, also the 'weak' pupils (*Oppmannsrapport – avgangsprøva i engelsk 2006 for Telemark, Buskerud og Vestfold*).

Bearing in mind that this chapter revolves around assessment and testing, an important issue is objectivity. When this exam was first introduced, several of my colleagues raised the question of whether reliability and objectivity were taken care of. The use of human raters is inevitable when we measure free language production, and this implies that there will always be elements of subjectivity. . With the discrete-point trend of the 1960s and 1970s the extent of objectivity was higher, since the use of key-answer questions were more frequently used. In line with this we can say that there is a direct relationship between the test and the scores in objectively scored tests. Tests like multiple choice or cloze tests are scored objectively, that is without any kind of subjective assessment.

The current exam on the other hand, with free writing production both in Part A and Part B is characterized by a more complicated assessment procedure. One word which is recurring is 'judgement'. The teachers and examiners are supposed to use their own personal judgement when they assess a text or a set of tasks written by a pupil. And as we know we all have our own personal judgement, and there may actually be rather substantial variations. The use of human raters is necessary, but it entails some problematic issues, meaning that some teachers tend to be rather lenient with grades, while others are rather strict. This is not a new phenomenon, but a pupil's text can actually be given the grade 3 by one teacher and 5 by another.

In my opinion, a very important issue is to make sure that teachers of EFL should be sufficiently trained in assessment and testing. From my own experience and after talking to colleagues, it seems that there are many teachers who feel that they should have more practice and instruction in assessment. Furthermore, there should be a stronger focus on the interpretation of the evaluation criteria used at the final exam. Actually it is stated quite clearly in the guidelines for the final exam that both teachers and pupils should familiarize themselves with the criteria of the evaluation form. I will also discuss this issue in Chapter 8.

### 6.3 Testing practice of EFL in the lower secondary school

The work as a teacher of EFL consists among other things of continuous testing of pupils' knowledge and skills, and to give pupils feedback about their work.

Traditionally teachers have spent hours correcting mistakes in spelling and grammar followed by a well formulated and pedagogical comment at the end of a pupil's paper. The feedback teachers give to their pupils seem to vary considerably. Some focus on grammatical mistakes, some give only comments, some have a system of codes or abbreviations in the margins e.g. (sp = spelling mistake, gr. = grammatical error etc.) and some focus on content. Salient questions to ask are: "Do the pupils pay attention to the feedback they receive? To what extent is such correction helpful?"

Research carried out in recent years has tried to address the problem, and the attitude to error correction is different today than it was only ten years ago. As noted before, L97 claims that errors can be seen as signs of learning, and the focus on current assessment should be on communicative competence. However, although the syllabus both for the lower and the upper secondary school maintain that pupils should be assessed in terms of their overall communicative competence, my impression is that many teachers still focus mostly on surface level mistakes when they give feedback to their pupils.

In the day to day work in the EFL classrooms, the teachers give their pupils continually feedback about their work, and the more the teachers have knowledge about assessment and testing, the more successful the feedback is. It is necessary that the teacher takes into consideration individual learner characteristics: level of proficiency, prior knowledge, motivation, needs and personal preferences (Bøhn in *Språk og Språkundervisning* 3/05:24). Furthermore, it is crucial to make sure that the pupils work systematically with their errors, and gain an insight into what the problem or problems are.

The intention of feedback to the pupils is to improve the pupils' written proficiency, and help them understand what they should work with in order to do so. Linguistic research will come up with new theories, and paradigms will change again

concerning error correction and feedback to pupils. However, the crucial point is whether the pupils understand what they have to do in order to be a more competent writer.

## 6.4 The evaluation criteria used at the final exam

An important tool for teachers and examiners is the evaluation form which is used at the final exam (See appendix no. 2) According to the guidelines for the examiners it is stated that: *“This way the examiners will get an overview of the competence of the individual pupil which he/she needs in order to be able to give a total evaluation of the pupil’s answer. This form may also be useful when one examiner will share his views about the main objectives for a specific grade with his co-examiner”*

*(Retningslinjer for sensur for sentralt gitt skriftlig avgangsprøve og eksamen 2006:2, my translation).*

The evaluation form is available both in Norwegian and English, and the examiners should start by sorting the pupils’ answers into the following categories: *above average, average or below average*. The evaluation form is divided into four major parts: ‘Comprehension’, ‘Content’, ‘Structure’ and ‘Language’, and each of these parts contain several criteria. In addition, the examiners will determine whether a pupil’s answer belongs in the category of ‘Fully’, ‘Partly’ or ‘Barely/No’. According to the examiners’ guidelines, the first and most important criterion of a good answer is that the pupil’s text communicates a message, and in order to communicate well the text must have relevant content, a clear structure and functional language.

One of the criteria in the section of ‘Content’ is precisely: *“Does the pupil demonstrate a willingness to communicate?”* An interesting point with regard to this question is what makes a text communicate? I believe there will be different opinions about this among teachers and examiners. One issue, which may turn out to be quite crucial is the handwriting of some pupils which at best may be difficult to read. As an examiner it is frustrating to spend much time trying to interpret the handwriting of an

examinee, and in my opinion this may impair communication to a large extent. In the examiners' guidelines there are comments to each of the different sections of the evaluation form, and with regard to 'Content' the guidelines state that: "*A good language is not enough, if the pupil does not show an ability to develop content above the surface level. The examiner will credit pupils who, in spite of an answer containing many mistakes and deficiencies, show a willingness to solve the tasks*" (Sensorrettleiing Avgangsprøva i engelsk 2006:6, my translation).

As for 'Comprehension', one of the criteria for the examiners is: "*Have the pupils understood the techniques and conventions used in the text?*" The way I see it, this is a difficult aspect to consider, and the use of personal judgment may lead to different opinions. It would have been interesting to comment on each and every one of the criteria of the evaluation form, but I have to concentrate on some of them due to the scope of this thesis.

In the section of 'Structure', the criteria deal with genre requirements and with awareness of the reader. The focus on genre is strong in L97, as mentioned above, and the awareness of the reader is emphasized in the prevailing theory of the teaching of writing. As mentioned in Chapter 5, organizing a text is important and the use of paragraphs, linking words and phrases as well. The ideal situation is that the testing of writing reflects the teaching, thus the focus on these criteria should be emphasized by the teachers of EFL. The comments in the guidelines state clearly that: "*The examiner must credit answers with a competent use of paragraphs and linking words and phrases*". Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the guidelines maintain that: "*The examiner must be aware that genres may be flexible categories and not strictly defined frames for the texts*" (Sensorrettleiing Avgangsprøva i engelsk 2006:6, my translation).

The 'Language' section of the evaluation form contains criteria regarding the language being ambitious, idiomatic and accurate, and the examiner will also have to determine whether the language of a pupil's answer is good enough to 'get the message across'. Yet again, the individual examiners' personal judgment may elicit



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various evaluations of this question. The comments in the guidelines state that: *“The examiner must evaluate whether the language contributes to conveying the message, or whether it impairs what the pupil wants to express. The examiner will credit pupils who are ambitious enough to use a more advanced language (choice of words, idiomatic language, variation etc.).”* Furthermore, a point of particular interest, in my opinion, is the following: *“It will always be a matter of discussion about what constitutes serious mistakes in English. The language is constantly changing and has many variations”* *“(Sensorrettleiing Avgangsprøva i engelsk 2006:6, my translation).* The teachers’ opinion of what constitutes serious mistakes in English may vary considerably and the degree of experience and practice of the individual teacher influences the way he/she deals with this issue.

## 6.5 Evaluation of English with ICT

The final exam in English with ICT has been arranged for some years now, and this exam has its own evaluation form. I will give a description of the final exam with ICT in Chapter 7, but I will look into the corresponding guidelines for evaluation in this section. The main objective of the exam with ICT is the same as with the traditional model, viz that it is the product on the day of the exam proper which will be assessed. The examiners’ guidelines state that the examiners must familiarize themselves with the tasks and the suggested links to the Internet in advance. It is the overall impression of the pupils’ answers which determine the grade, and like the traditional exam the free writing part should be emphasized. Roughly speaking the same criteria are used in the evaluation form of the exam with ICT as that of the traditional exam (See appendix 3). However, the section of ‘Comprehension’ is replaced by ‘Reference to sources on the web’.

Some examiners were asked in advance to assess the exams with ICT, and although they do not need an advanced education in the use of ICT, they need to be generally updated and have relevant knowledge of these tests. It is to be regretted that the

experiences and results of the exam with ICT of 2005 and 2006 do not appear in the examiners' report. Neither is there any separate report from the exam with ICT.

## 6.6 Grades after the introduction of L97

As noted on several occasions in this thesis, the main objective with the final written exam in English is that the pupils will get the opportunity to show their overall skills and competence in EFL. As teachers we would like our pupils to succeed, and obtain as good grades as possible. Hence, I find it pertinent to devote some attention to the distribution of grades at the final exam after the implementation of L97.

One of the innovations at the outset of L97 was a new six-point scale of grading from 1-6, with 6 as the best grade. Results show that grade 1 and 6 were scarcely awarded by examiners for example in 2002, nor were grades 2 and 5 used liberally. According to A.S. Langeland who has done some research in this area, grades 3 and 4 were the grades that examiners handed out in an overwhelming number of cases (*Språk og Språkundervisning 1/03*). The new scale replaced the old five-point scale with Sg (Excellent) at the top and Lg (Very weak) at the bottom. G (Good) was the average mark. The idea among my colleagues with the introduction of this scale was to compare 3 and 4 from the six-point scale with G (good) from the old. Naturally, the teachers all over the country needed some time to adjust to this new scale.

The results for Telemark, Buskerud and Vestfold for 2005 and 2006 show this distribution:

	2005	2006
6	3,40 %	2,70 %
5	13,70 %	16,70 %
4	29,40 %	30,50 %
3	34,20 %	33,90 %
2	15,90 %	13,40 %
1	3,40 %	2,70 %

*Table 6.1*

In her master's thesis referred to above, H.B. Lia argues that there has been no improvement in written examination result in Norwegian lower secondary schools since 1983 even after the introduction of new writing strategies (Drew 1997 in Lia 2001:8). According to Drew writing has suffered as a consequence of the communicative approach to teaching, and occasional evidence points to the fact that this is the case in the upper secondary school as well.

Statistics published at the web sites of the Board of Education show that there are small changes in the grades given in English over the last five years.

Year	The final written exam	Grade at the end of the term
2001-02	3.5	3.7
2002-03	3.5	3.7
2003-04	3.6	3.7
2004-04	3.6	3.8

*Table 6.2*

The stability of the average grades during these years indicates that the examiners have succeeded in forming some sort of a "community of interpretation" (tolkningsfellesskap). There has been, however, a tendency of an accumulation in the middle of the scale over the last three years, meaning that the grades 3 and 4 are more frequently used. A salient question however, is why so few pupils manage to get grades above average.

There are differences between the grades of girls and boys both with regard to the final written exam in English and in the grades received at the end of the term in the subject. Figures from the Board of Education show that the average grade for girls at the final exam of 2004 was 3.7 while it was 3.3 for boys. This is an interesting phenomenon, but I shall have to refrain from commenting any further on this issue at the moment. However, I believe this is an area of interest for educational research.

## 6.7 Summing up of the two interviews

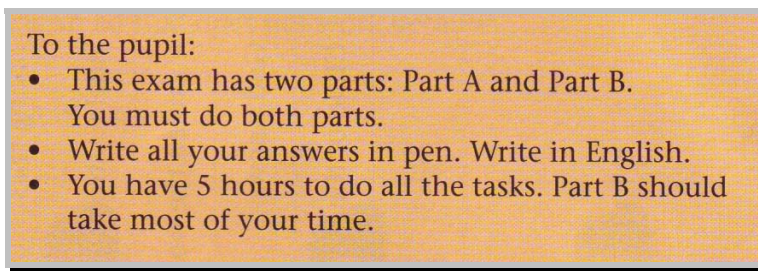
In conclusion of this chapter I would like to sum up the two interviews I had with two examiners of English. The procedure of the interviews is described in Chapter 1, and a summary of the two interviews is included in appendix no. 4. The two examiners expressed that they both think that the exam is valid, and that the Free Writing part gives the pupils an opportunity to show what they know in English. They also claimed that the current assessment procedures are satisfactory concerning reliability and objectivity. The examiners I interviewed both maintain that teachers in general have far too little knowledge about the evaluation criteria which are used, and that more focus on practice in assessment and testing among teachers is needed. One salient issue on the part of the two examiners was the positive effect of using their personal judgement in assessing the exams, and they both confirmed that the exam influence the way they teach oral and written English.

## **7. A description of the exams from 2000 – 2006**

In the present chapter I will look more closely into the exam sets given from 2000 to 2006. In order not to make this too extensive I have to pick out a selection of issues I want to address, and which are of relevance to my thesis. First I will focus on the content of the booklets and pay attention to the importance of the paintings and illustrations included. Secondly I will look into the tasks given in Part A, and devote some attention to the experience I gained as an examiner, with regard to task 4 Part A 2006. Thirdly, I will also explore the tasks given in the Free Writing part in general, and with regard to genre awareness in particular. In doing so, I will focus on the aspect of cultural competence and text comprehension. I will also touch upon the choice of tasks. A main issue will be to discuss what aims are being tested and find out whether or not the exams have been in accordance with the prevailing syllabus. Finally, an area which has reached increased attention is the English exam with ICT, and I include a description of this type of exam in this chapter. I will provide examples from the exam sets which illustrate the issues I bring forth.

### **7.1 Part A of the exam**

The exams given from 2000 and onwards differ from the previous exams in several ways, and I will point at these differences as I describe the exams. The exams consist of two main parts, as mentioned earlier, a Part A called Read and Relate, and a Part B called Free Writing. The instruction on the front page has been the same from 2000 and to this year's exam:



*Figure 7.1 Introduction to the exam*

All the instructions are in English and the word ‘task’ is used instead of ‘exercise’ which was used previously. Part A consists of 4 tasks, and the pupils need to use the booklet in order to answer. The tasks in Part A may offer the pupils a choice between two questions. The instructions read that the pupils should write a paragraph or two in response to the tasks in Part A, and there has been some discussion over the years among teachers and examiners as to the length of a paragraph. This is not specified in the instructions.

There are some words and expressions which are used repeatedly in the instructions to the tasks in Part A like for example:

- Write a paragraph or two where you give reasons for your choice
- Write a paragraph or two where you reflect upon this question
- Choose the one you like best and give reasons for your choice
- What do you think is the most important theme? Write a paragraph or two giving reasons for your answer
- State your opinion on this topic

As we can see, the pupils are asked to think for themselves, there are no right or wrong answers, and the pupils can choose whatever response they like, the only requirement is that they can communicate their message. It seems very clear that the teachers of the current EFL have an obligation to make sure that their pupils know how to state an opinion or to discuss a topic. The construction of a non-narrative text

demands that the pupils know how to build up their text, how to structure the arguments, and not let the pros and cons drop in on an impulse. As mentioned before, the exam is going to reflect the teaching of English during the three years of lower secondary school. The pupils should not encounter these requirements for the first time at the final exam.

The tasks in Part A of these exams are to a great extent about making choices, which means that pupils have an option and do not have to write about something they want to avoid. Furthermore, the pupils are asked to identify themselves with characters in the booklet and give their opinion about important decisions, and to use their imagination and provide the solution to a problem. The principle of ‘real world’ tasks has been emphasized by the test designers of the exam according to L97, in the sense that the pupils are given a context or a situational description under which they are supposed to write.

From 2004 and onwards, Part A and Part B were distributed on separate sheets. The reason for this was that the Exam Secretariat, which it was called at the time, had opened up for the use of a process oriented approach to writing at the final exam in English. The process oriented approach had gained ground in English as well as in the Norwegian school subject, and as a consequence the organization of the exam had to be somewhat different and including additional 90 minutes.

## 7.2 The topics of the booklets

I gave a rather extensive description of the structure of the exam in Chapter 3, hence I will address the issues of the tasks directly in this chapter. I find it relevant to explore the development of the exam since it was first implemented and to the last exam given. The booklet has a specific topic each year, and all the texts and illustrations in the booklet are more or less connected to the topic. The topics are supposed to be of interest and relevance to young people, and they also reflect the technological

development in society and relationship among people. The following table gives the topics as well as the number of pages in the booklets:

Year	Topic	Pages
2000	We are the world, we are the future	19
2001	Times to remember	18
2002	Animals	16
2003	People's lives	24
2004	Shrinking the world	19
2005	Challenges	20
2006	Colours	20

*Table 7.1 The topics of the exam sets from 2000 to 2006 and the number of pages*

The amount of text the pupils are supposed to read have been rather stable, except in 2003, when the number of pages jumped to 24. The idea is that the booklet will serve as an inspiration for the pupils when they respond to the tasks, and be an incentive for the Free Writing part. Feedback from pupils and examiners indicate that the link between the texts in the booklet and the tasks given in the exam may be even stronger. To my experience, some pupils fail to see that the booklet is useful to them. It is a general assumption that the booklet is mostly needed in order to respond to task 1 in Part A. This task is usually a task where the pupils are asked to recognize e.g. persons/characters in the booklet and link them to a text. Or to put it another way, it is a task to see if the pupils have read and understood the contents of the booklet and are able to sort out information. All pupils are able to respond to this task since they have the booklet, and this is regarded as a positive start of the exam. The phrasing of this task has varied over the years, but a typical example of task 1 Part A is the one from 2001 below.



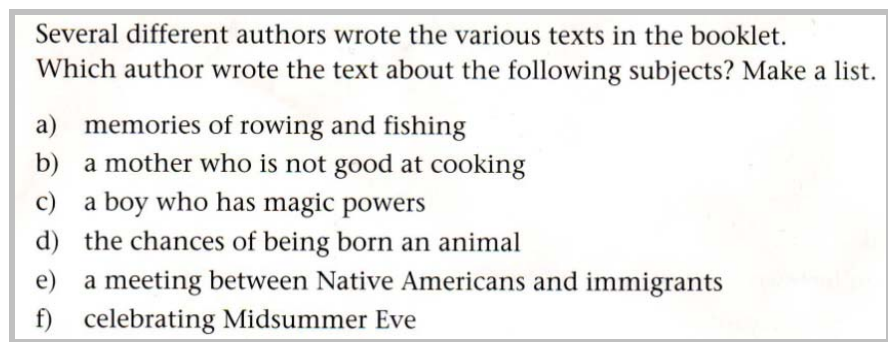


Figure 7.2 Part A - Task 1 - Final exam 10th grade 2001

### 7.3 Pictures and illustrations

The intention of the test designers was that the pictures and illustrations used in the booklet should be an inspiration to the pupils. The way I see it the pupils get the opportunity to use their creative and aesthetic sense, and be introduced to the work of artists they are not familiar with. An example of this is the American artist Norman Rockwell. His paintings are used in the booklets from 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2006 and the title of the painting underlines the topic.

Year	Topic	Title of painting
2000	We are the world, we are the future	'The Golden Rule'
2001	Times to remember	'Freedom from want'
2003	People's lives	'The Runaway' 1958
2006	Colours	'Girl at the Mirror' 1954

Table 7.2 Paintings used to illustrate texts in the booklet

In the booklet from 2001 (Times to remember) one text is about 'Summer Solstice' and the illustration with this text is a painting by Severin Krøyer called 'Sankthansbål på Skagens Strand' from 1903. Likewise on the frontpage of the booklet from 2004 (Shrinking the world) there is a painting by Michelangelo called 'The *hand of God* (Detail from the *Creation of Adam*)' from 1508-12. Other illustrations used are

cartoons with well known characters like *Snoopy*, *Calvin and Hobbes* and *Baltus*. There are photos of famous people like the Beckhams, Thor Heyerdahl, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Linn Ullmann and Fidel Castro, to mention some. Furthermore, there are photos of young people who our pupils can identify with and all the photos are in bright colours with an appealing lay out. The illustrations are put in the booklet to be used, and some of the tasks given reflect this.

<b>TASK 1</b>
This booklet is called <i>People's Lives</i> . Which of the pictures or paintings do you think illustrates the title best?
Write a paragraph or two where you give reasons for your choice.

Figure 7.3 Part A - Task 1 - Final exam 10th grade 2003

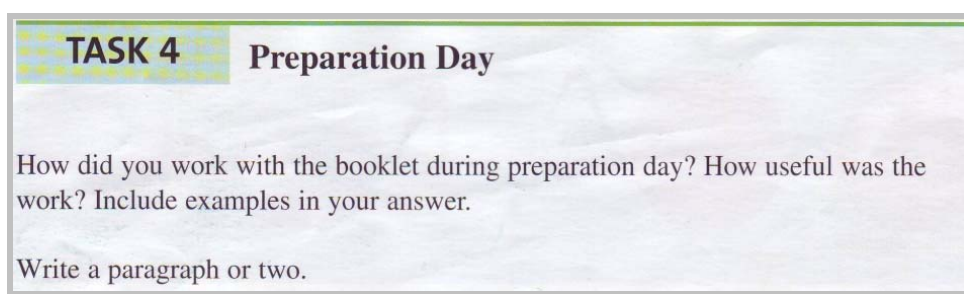
The task above from 2003 shows one approach to the use of the illustrations, and demonstrates that the tasks given are 'open' since the pupils may choose whichever illustration they want and give their own opinion. The answers cannot be considered right or wrong as long as the pupils give reasons for their answers. The examiners have to assess to what extent they have reflected about the question, and how they manage to communicate their opinion. The tasks of Part A, and also to a great extent the tasks of the Free Writing part, require that the pupils are able to express their opinions and thoughts about a text. This complies with the aim of L97 stating that the pupils should be given the opportunity to develop the ability to find their way around in English texts and to express what they experience in their encounters with those texts (L97 English version:239).

## 7.4 Task 4 Part A - Preparation Day

Due to the limitations set with regard to this thesis I have to confine the amount of aspects I bring up about the exams given. Thus I would now like to address the focus

in Part A on the use of the preparation day and booklet. By asking the pupils about the use of the preparation day, they will have to reflect upon the use of this day and how they work with the booklet. Besides, the responses from the pupils provide constructive feedback both for teachers, examiners and test designers.

Both in 2005 and 2006 task 4 in Part A focused on how the pupils prepared for the exam, and my guess is that this task will be given one way or the other in the future as well. This task actually demands that the pupils have reflected upon how they worked on the preparation day and are able to put it into words. Two of my research questions focus on the use of the booklet and the preparation day before the final exam. Thus it was a fortunate coincidence for me when I chose to sign up as an examiner for 2006, because one of the tasks in Part A was about the use of the preparation day. The exact phrasing of task 4 was:



*Figure 7.4 Part A - Task 4 - Final exam 10th grade 2006*

This section is dedicated to analyzing and commenting on the answers to task 4 from the pupils' papers I was assigned to grade. In order not to make this too comprehensive I had to make quite "rough" categories of the elements of the answers. My main objective was to look into what the pupils thought of the preparation day, and of the usefulness of the day. Not all pupils answered comprehensively, and did not say explicitly whether the day had been useful or not. However, it was possible to detect a tendency in what they said, and I found it most interesting reading. The way I see it, these findings may be of great importance to teachers and test designers alike. The total of pupils involved was 146. I have no way of knowing whether these are

boys or girls, since this material is confidential. The categories I used in analyzing pupils' responses to task 4 were:

Statements
I found the work useful
I don't know
I did not find it useful
I read the booklet one or more times
I got help from my teacher
I worked in groups/pairs
I worked individually
I took notes
The work helped me to find the answers to the tasks (especially task 1)
I used a grammar book
I read previous English tests, grammar/dictionaries
I looked up Internet sites (ref. from the booklet)
I got new ideas from others
The booklet got me thinking about colours
I listened to CD/watched the film " A few good men".

*Table 7.3 A survey of the statements used in the findings of task 4*

Over half of the pupils expressed specifically that they found the preparation day useful, and some said it indirectly. Only a few thought that it was not useful, and I think that is encouraging with regard to the future of the preparation day.

Furthermore, most pupils read the booklet one or more times, and that was by far the most common approach to the work on the preparation day. The number of pupils responding to the categories further down the list varies, but my impression is that pupils tried to use the learning strategies they found most useful.

The main question in task 4 was how the pupils worked with the booklet during preparation day. As many as 104 students answered that they read the booklet one or more times. The number could vary from one to six times. There are several

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approaches to the reading of the booklet, and these pupils' responses give a good picture of the diversities. Only one pupil mentions listening to the texts on CD. This is also an option, especially for pupils who find a great amount of texts difficult to read. Some pupils say they discussed the texts in groups or pairs, and found that useful. However, as teachers we know that working in groups is not always to the benefit of all pupils. Not all pupils come to the preparation day ready to study and share with the others, so this can be a mixed experience.

As noted above, one intention of the booklet is to give the pupils help and inspiration while they are working on the tasks of the exam. Quite a few pupils stated that they found the booklet useful, especially in connection with task 1 in Part A. These answers from the pupils give quite an indication as to how the preparation day was used, and what the pupils think is important. This is information of use for teachers and test designers alike. The majority of the pupils claimed that they read the booklet, and also that they tried to figure out what kind of tasks might be given, and thus how to best prepare for the exam.

By and large I have to say that I found the answers from the pupils very informative for the research questions I have outlined earlier. Naturally I cannot conclude that I have the correct picture after grading 146 papers, but I still think it's a good indicator of the state of affairs. It seems to me that many pupils use the preparation day the way it was intended, and that they acknowledge the usefulness of the day.

## 7.5 Genre awareness in Part B

One of the questions in my questionnaire to teachers is whether they are conscious of the different genres the pupils may encounter at the exam. As mentioned in Chapter 8 L97 brings up the issue of genre awareness in the syllabus both for the 8th and the 9th grade, and in the 10th grade it is stated that the pupils will work with texts of different genres and from different periods. The following is a survey of the genres used in part B from the 2000 exam until 2006.

Exams given from 2000-2006	Booklet - topic	Free written production	Genres used
2000	We are the world, we are the future....	7 tasks	- Letter to an editor - personal text - article - essay - text - story
2001	Times to remember	6 tasks	- article - letter to an editor - text - story - personal text - manuscript for a speech
2002	Animals	7 tasks	- review - fairytale - letter to an editor - personal text - story - report
2003	People's lives	7 tasks	- a biography - article - personal text - story - letter
2004	Shrinking the world	7 tasks	- mystery story - personal text - diary entry - article - story - text
2005	Challenges	6 tasks	- story - personal text - diary - article
2006	Colours	6 tasks	- diary entry/ story/article - story/fairy tale - personal text - letter - text/story

*Table 7.4 Survey of the genres asked for in the Free writing part from 2000-2006*

I find it relevant to use examples from the exams given to illustrate how different genres are described in Part B, and I will start by looking into ‘article’ which is normally considered an ‘open’ genre. To illustrate how an article as a genre is introduced at the final exam, I will provide different examples:

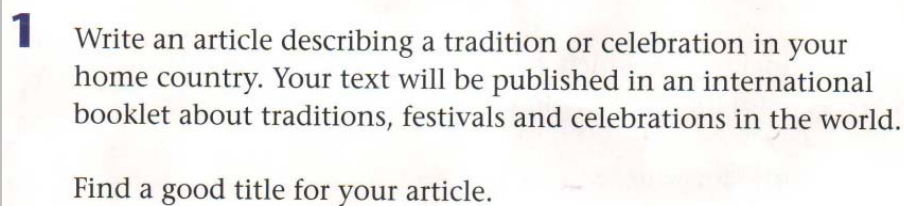
- 
- A rectangular box with a thin black border and a light beige background. It contains a blue number '1' followed by text about writing an article about traditions and finding a title.
- 1** Write an article describing a tradition or celebration in your home country. Your text will be published in an international booklet about traditions, festivals and celebrations in the world.
- Find a good title for your article.

Figure 7.5 Task 1 - Final exam 10th grade 2001

This task challenges the pupils to reflect upon our Norwegian traditions like for example the 17th of May or our Christmas celebration, and then to communicate this to fictional readers. The task includes a cultural aspect as well. One of the aims of L97 is to present pupils with the opportunity to become acquainted with other cultures. Such insight lays the foundations for greater respect and tolerance, contributes to new ways of thinking, and broadens their understanding of their own cultural roots. (L97 English version: 237). In fact one of the criteria of the evaluation form which is used by examiners at the final exam is whether the pupils demonstrate cultural competence. I described this evaluation form in Chapter 6 above (See appendix no. 2)

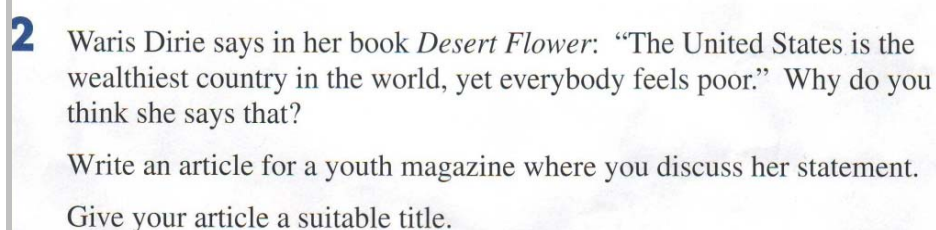
- 
- A rectangular box with a thin black border and a light beige background. It contains a blue number '2' followed by a quote from Waris Dirie and instructions to write an article discussing the statement.
- 2** Waris Dirie says in her book *Desert Flower*: “The United States is the wealthiest country in the world, yet everybody feels poor.” Why do you think she says that?
- Write an article for a youth magazine where you discuss her statement.
- Give your article a suitable title.

Figure 7.6 Task 2 - Final exam 10th grade 2003

Task 2 above requires that the pupils demonstrate cultural competence. It requires both that the pupils know something about society in the United States, and that they can identify themselves with the person Waris Dirie.

The next genre to be discussed is 'letter' which is a quite frequently used genre since the introduction of this type of exam. Below there are two examples of this genre given from the year 2000 to 2006:

**2** From a letter to the editor of *The Times*:

*... young people today are so restless that they cannot sit down with a book. And if they read at all, it is pure trash, idiotic comics or worthless romance. The book is dead for these youngsters and as a result they are nearly brain dead. When I was young, we knew our Dickens and Shakespeare ...*

*Arthur Smythe-Windsor*

Write a letter to the editor of *The Times* in which you comment on Arthur Smythe-Windsor's letter.

Find a good heading for your letter.

Figure 7.7 Task 2 - Final exam 10th grade 2001

**4** Wristbands

There are so many wristbands on the market, but you still want to promote a wristband that is very special to *you*.

- What is your wristband for?
- What colour is it and why?
- How much money do you hope to raise?
- How is the money going to be used?
- What marketing strategies will you use to sell your wristband in a world where "coloured wristbands are a crazy craze"?

Write a letter to your local bank explaining why you need their support.

Figure 7.8 Task 4 - Final exam 10th grade 2006

One type of task given at several occasions is a letter to the editor of a paper or a magazine. In task 2 2001 above the pupils are asked to write a letter to the editor of *The Times* and comment on a letter already published in the newspaper. This means that they need to know what an editor is, and how to address such a person.



Furthermore, they need to be able to know how to express themselves in an objective manner, and discuss pros and cons with regard to the topic of the letter in question.

As an examiner in 2006 I experienced that the letter which was asked for in task 4 was not that easy to relate to. Out of about 148 pupils, only 11 pupils chose this task. The requirement of the task was a letter to the local bank (See task 4 2006 above). This means that the pupils need to know how to write a formal letter and that this is very different from a letter to a close friend. In my experience none of the papers I was assigned to grade responded to this task with a result above average. One explanation may be that they had never written a formal letter before, never applied for a loan and that their financial insight was limited. However, the fact that 11 pupils chose the task in question shows that some pupils are perfectly capable of responding to tasks like this in a successful way.

## 7.6 The choice of tasks

An interesting issue is always which tasks the pupils seem to favour at an exam. We have no way of knowing why they choose the tasks they do, and there may be a variety of reasons for individual choices. Personally I believe that the genre may be of secondary importance for pupils when they choose their free writing task. I think their first priority depends on whether a topic appeals to them or not, and whether they think they have enough to write about. The latter is often the crucial question. The number of genres to choose from is higher today than before L97 came into effect, but is this appreciated by the pupils? A good indication is the reports from the examiners' report for 2005 and 2006.

According to the one from 2005 the majority of the pupils chose task 3 and 4 in the Free Writing Part with task 4 as the big winner. The topic for the 2005 exam was 'Challenges' and all the tasks ask the pupils to reflect upon the topic. In task 3 the pupils were asked to write a story or a diary, while in task 4 the requirement was a personal text. The examiners' report for 2006 also showed that the pupils seemed to

favour some of the tasks. In my experience the same tendency is obvious when we use previous exams for practice, and tasks where the pupils are required to write a story in association with a picture are often popular.

## 7.7 English with ICT

I find it pertinent in this chapter to include a passage about the exam in English with ICT. In 2003 the Exam Secretariat opened up for the possibility of trying English with ICT, but there have actually been schools which has done research on this and tried it since 1999. Ever since 2003 there has been a gradual increase in the number of pupils passing their English exam with ICT. The figures from the Board of Education show that the number of pupils using English with ICT is increasing. In 2005 about 480 pupils passed this exam nationwide, whereas as many as 1000 pupils did so in 2006.

The exam with ICT has the same goal as the traditional one, which is to enable the pupils to show their overall competence in English. The ICT model is quite different from the traditional model in the sense that the pupils are asked to find information on the Internet. The topic is also different in the two types of exams. The exam with ICT emphasizes the pupils' ability to show how well they understand English, how well they know how to use it by writing themselves, as well as reflect upon the contents of texts, illustrations and topic. Furthermore the guidelines for 2006 state that this year's exam focus on learning strategies, and includes more technological possibilities; sound, animation and film. On a par with the traditional exam, it is the product of the day of the actual exam which is to be assessed, but this day is a natural extension of the preparation day. Obviously, the preparation day must be organized differently with the ICT model.

According to the new curriculum which is in the process of being implemented, the demand for digital competence is increasing in society. The consequence is probably that the ICT model will gain ground, and presumably replace the current exam. The

ICT exam has its own group of test designers, just like the traditional exam.

According to the leader of this group, Per Aage Krekling, the most important purpose of an exam is to enable the pupils to show their competence of English, not to disclose what they do not know. The day of the exam is meant to be a day where the pupils feel that they have accomplished something. For several of our pupils the use of ICT may motivate them to work even better with the subject. Young people today are very competent regarding ICT, and by teaching and guiding them we may enable them to use ICT as a tool and an inspiration to learn EFL.

One very important objective is that the exam is going to reflect the teaching of English. Consequently the use of ICT at the final written exam of English has to be taught systematically so that the pupils involved know what is required of them. This should be a process involving teachers, pupils and headmasters in due course. It is also a good idea to inform the parents either in writing or at a PTA meeting about the elements of the exam.

Finally I want to look briefly into one of these exams to show what they are like. The teachers are expected to find all the information necessary on the Board of Education's web pages, and download it from there. The preparation day is used in the same way as the traditional exam meaning that the pupils can work individually or in groups or pairs, and they may use a memo sheet just like the others. However, the pupils have to give reference to the sources they have used on the Internet and write them on the memo sheet. The pupils will not have access to the Internet on the day of the exam.

The exam with ICT contains two tasks, Task 1 which corresponds to some degree to Part A of the traditional exam, and Task 2 which is a Free Writing part. In the latter pupils will have to choose both genre and title of the task themselves, but the tasks should be related to the topic of the exam. Due to the scope of this thesis I cannot describe the exam with ICT in detail, but the important issue is that pupils who pass their exam in English with ICT must have practiced sufficiently before the exam.

## 7.8 Summing up

In this chapter I have looked into a number of tasks given at the final exam from 2000 to 2006. The overall aim of the test designers is that the pupils should be given the opportunity to use the language as a means of communication. There is a variety of tasks both in Part A and in Part B, and the pupils are able to make choices. The tasks are mainly ‘open’ in the sense that the teachers and examiners are required to use their personal judgement in order to assess the pupils’ answers. The tasks may also be challenging to the pupils, and a number of them require maturity and a great extent of text competence on the part of the pupils. Furthermore, I have devoted much of this chapter to the discussion of the answers from pupils regarding task 4 2006, where the issue of the preparation day was brought forth. The aims tested are in accordance with L97 the way I see it, both with regard to genre awareness, cultural competence and the pupils’ ability to find their way around English texts and express what they experience in their encounters with these texts. I have also given a description of the English exam with ICT, and looked into the structure of this compared to the traditional exam.

## 8. The findings of my survey

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, an important part of it would be to analyze and comment on the findings of the questionnaire I made and handed out to teachers in my area of the country, the municipalities of Skien and Porsgrunn. I had to make use of a convenience sample, meaning that I simply used all the teachers available who had some experience with the exam after the implementation of L97. The number of teachers in my target group was 82, and I have to admit that I had to make a number of phone calls, and send a number of e-mails to get the questionnaires back. I had originally set a dead line, but maybe teachers as a group are a bit hard to convince, because it took considerably longer time before I finally got them back, and then only half of them. Thus this is not a representative sample as such, but I believe that these findings still reflect a good view of what this group of teachers think about the final exam and their role in it.

Hence, I am grateful to those who took time to answer my questionnaire and thus contribute to my work with this thesis. To use a questionnaire is a quantitative approach to the collection of data, and it gives a picture of what a number of people think about a certain issue or issues. Compared to a qualitative approach like an interview, a quantitative study cannot give the same rich and detailed data, and since as in my case it is not representative we cannot draw the conclusion that the findings of the sample can apply to the whole population. However, it represents the views and opinions of my colleagues, and I find it interesting to comment on these results. My main objectives were to find out what my fellow teachers think about this exam, and their own role in it.

The teachers also play an important part on the preparation day, and I wanted to look into whether the practice among teachers differs from school to school and from teacher to teacher. For the purpose of this thesis I cannot comment on all the questions to the teachers, but the total results of the survey are to be found in appendix no. 5. The alternatives on the reply forms were: *I totally agree – I agree – I*

*agree to some extent – I don't agree – I don't know.* The questionnaire sent to the teachers were in Norwegian but is translated into English in the following. I refer to the guidelines for the final exam in the circular sent out for 2006, and all the quotes are translated by me, and are to be found from page 9 – 11 in (*Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver i grunnskolen våren 2006*).

## 8.1 Results and comments on the questions to the teachers

Every year the Board of Education sends out circulars to the schools informing them of the final written exam in English. The teachers are supposed to study the instructions and familiarize themselves with the guidelines for the exam. There have only been small changes over the last years. It is stated in the circular that the preparation day and the day of the actual exam should be a natural consequence of the teaching throughout the school year (*Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver i grunnskolen våren 2006: 9, my translation*).

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
2.	I teach my pupils on this day, and suggest what they should do in relation to the texts.	20 %	26%	28 %	26 %	0 %	0 %

Table 8.1

These are very interesting figures since the instructions from the Board of Education are as follows:

*The teacher will be present to motivate, inspire, guide, answer questions and he may also ask questions to help the pupils in their work* (*Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver i grunnskolen våren 2006: 9, my translation*).

The question is whether this instruction is specific enough? Obviously it is not, since as many as 20% say that they actually teach the pupils on this day. Once again from my own experience, I know that there are different practices among my colleagues, which means that the interpretation of the instruction may be different from one teacher to another. It is my impression that some teachers still are a bit uncertain as to what their role should be on the preparation day. This will also depend on how the pupils have been taught during their time in lower secondary school. Has the teacher been teaching to the exam? Do the pupils know what to expect? Do they have sufficient practice in reading? Have they used this exam model for practice in previous grades, or did the teacher just introduce it in the 10th grade? Are the pupils used to work independently? I believe all these questions are relevant in connection with these findings, and most importantly they indicate to what extent the final exam is in accordance with the way we teach our pupils. Some pupils will definitely need more help on a day like this, and the intention is that all pupils will have the help and guidance they require.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
7.	In my experience the pupils work well and in a systematic manner on the preparation day.	4 %	13%	61 %	22 %	0 %	0 %

Table 8.2

*“The pupils may work with the booklet for 3-5 hours on the preparation day. They can discuss and reflect upon the contents of the texts, pictures and illustrations. Together they can find topics, study the way the texts are constructed and what literary means are used. They can work with associations given by the booklet and find questions/topics related to the texts and pictures” (Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver i grunnskolen våren 2006: 9, my translation).*

As we know our pupils are different, and they work in different ways, just like we do as adults. Some pupils show up at school and have read the booklet very well in advance, and others have just looked at it briefly or not at all. Thus, they will have different points of departure for their work on the preparation day. For some of our pupils the preparation day is important, and they feel they have to make the best use of it. Others may feel that they would just as soon prepare themselves at home, and do it the way they feel best suited for them.

Hence, I believe some teachers have the impression that some pupils come to school on the preparation day, and just ‘hang out’ and talk about other things than the texts in the booklet. However, if you add the three first columns of answers to question 7, as many as 78% of the teachers say that they agree to some extent or more, and I believe that gives a realistic picture of the situation. In my opinion I believe that the way this is organized you will always experience that a number of pupils do not use the day as it was intended, while others go home feeling that this was useful. I think one can also assume that the outcome of this day depends on the extent of maturity on the part of the pupils, and to what extent they are used to take responsibility for their own learning. By and large it is safe to say that the more the pupils are used to working with this type of exam, and the more they have practised during lower secondary school, the more they will benefit from the preparation day.

		<b>I totally agree</b>	<b>I agree</b>	<b>I agree to some extent</b>	<b>I don't agree</b>	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Blank</b>
11.	In my experience the pupils make good use of the booklet, and this is reflected in the texts they write.	0 %	7%	67 %	26 %	0 %	0 %

*Table 8.3*



*“The tasks given on the day of the exam are divided into Part A and Part B. In Part A there will be tasks related to the understanding of reading and tasks where the pupils e.g. can express how they react to the different texts or give their opinions on the language used in the texts. In Part B the pupils are asked to write a longer text. The tasks will be connected to booklet, and the work done by the pupils before the exam will help them in their actual writing, even if not all the texts are directly linked to one or more of the texts” ( Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver i grunnskolen våren 2006: 9, my translation).*

This will be an area open to judgement on the part of the teachers, also depending on to what extent they have studied the booklet themselves. In my experience as a teacher and now also as an examiner, the pupils feel that they mainly need the booklet for the work with the tasks in Part A. As can be seen from table 8.3 above, only a few teachers agree to the statement, and no one expresses that he/she totally agrees. However, it may be difficult to say specifically whether the booklet has been useful for the pupils or not, and that this is reflected in the texts they write.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
12.	I recommend my pupils to use a memo sheet at the exam.	67 %	30%	0 %	0 %	0 %	2 %

Table 8.4

I have quoted from the guidelines for the exam concerning the use of memo sheet in Chapter 3. It is encouraging to see that most of the teachers actually recommend the use of the memo sheet, but this is an area where there is room for improvement. As an examiner I discovered that the use of memo sheets varied immensely between pupils, classes and schools. Quite a number of pupils handed in blank papers, while others had written an extensive amount of information related to the texts on the memo sheets. Some classes had obviously worked together with the memo sheet, since they were almost identical. Furthermore, some pupils had written a few key

words about the texts or associations they might have to the topic. I must admit however, that I found it quite alarming that a small number of pupils actually had written down the conjugation of the verb ‘to be’ on their memo sheet and nothing else. The way I see it, to make the memo sheet a useful tool, the pupils have to be taught how to write down the information they need, and practise the skill of taking notes. Teachers do not always control the memo sheets on the preparation day, and I believe that some pupils are left to fill in this sheet the way they see fit. In my experience as an examiner I noticed that the variations among schools were quite substantial with regard to the memo sheet, and the Board of Education should emphasize that all schools follow the same guidelines.

At this point I would like to refer to a very interesting article about this topic, written by A.S. Langeland called ‘Memo Sheets in Written Exams: A lost opportunity’, (*Språk og Språkundervisning* 1/03). Langeland addresses the issue of memo sheets in the written exam and she analyzed data from the exams in the spring of 2002 from five school classes in lower secondary schools in the Southern region of Norway. In her article she claims that she initially expected pupils to embrace the new practice with enthusiasm, but to her surprise she found that less than half of them did so. The overall picture she gained was that many good ways of using the memo sheets existed, but pupils who made full use of the opportunities the memo sheets provided were indeed rare. She also questions whether the emphasis the Board of Education places on the discussion side of preparation has unwittingly undermined the potential of the memo sheet. Furthermore, she maintains that according to her study pupils seem to regard the memo sheet as a peripheral matter in relation to preparation for their exams. Langeland thinks that there is room for improvement especially by helping pupils structure the preparation time and by raising their awareness about how the booklet and memo sheets can empower them. She also suggests that teachers should focus more on learning strategies amongst their pupils to enable them to make better use of the memo sheets. The article was written in 2003, and her hope is that this valuable exam aid will be exploited more fully in the future. There is no way of knowing if the outcome had been the same if a similar survey had been carried out

today. However, in my point of view I think her opinions are still very relevant, and that schools need to focus more on the advantages of using the memo sheets through a long-term process of consciousness raising. The skill of taking notes in English whether for exam purposes or for other reasons is well worth practising.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
14.	The final exam influences the way I usually teach written and oral English.	0 %	28%	48 %	24 %	0 %	0 %

Table 8.5

One of the examiners I interviewed, Carl Magne Isaksen (See appendix no. 4) answered very promptly that the final written exam indeed influences the way he teaches EFL in his class during the year. And I believe that is the case with many teachers. The '*washback*' effect from testing to teaching is a well-known phenomenon, and I have touched upon it above. This way teachers and pupils can familiarize themselves with the type of tasks given both in part A and part B. The topic of the exam is different every year though, but the pupils will know what is required of them. As mentioned above the instructions for the exam state specifically that the preparation day and the actual writing on the day of the exam proper should be a natural consequence of the teaching during the school year, and the test designers' intention was that the exam should be seen as the end of a three year course where the pupils should be familiar with all the elements of the final exam during this time.

I assume that all the teachers who have answered my questionnaire have their individual approach to this question, and some may feel that they have a good balance in their teaching, using both the text book, and teaching for the exam. It is somewhat alarming though that 24% say that the exam does not influence their teaching during the school year, because it means that their pupils will not have the

same point of departure before the exam as pupils with teachers who take advantage of the ‘washback’ effect. There seems to be a need for consciousness raising on behalf of the teachers in this area, and our goal should always be to enable our pupils to succeed to the best of their abilities, which in this case means to provide them with the necessary information about the final exam and the way it is designed and offer them the knowledge and practice they need to achieve the best result possible.

		<b>I totally agree</b>	<b>I agree</b>	<b>I agree to some extent</b>	<b>I don't agree</b>	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Blank</b>
15.	I am concerned about the fact that my pupils will have sufficient knowledge about the different genres they encounter at the written exam.	22 %	50%	26 %	2 %	0 %	0 %

*Table 8.6*

Ever since the implementation of L97, the pupils have been faced with a greater variety of genres at the final exam. In previous years the focus was more on the writing of narrative texts, but with L97 and the strong emphasis on communication, the variety of genres has been more prominent. Traditional literary genres like short stories, fairy tales, articles, letters and diaries are used, in addition to more ‘open’ genres like speech, biography, personal text, story or simply text. It is stated in the examiners’ guidelines that the examiners must be open minded and regard the genres as flexible categories, and not as strictly defined frames for the texts. As for the genre ‘personal text’, it is meant to be like an essay and has similar characteristics.

However, the original test designers of this exam wanted to avoid the use of the concept ‘essay’ on the ground that this is a demanding genre for this age group.

Consequently, if we compare the exam from 2006 with the one given twenty years ago, we can see that the changes are substantial. From a more rigid demand for a composition or essay, the pupils today may choose between a number of genres.

Furthermore, several of the tasks actually have a multiple choice of genres; the pupils

may choose i.e. a diary entry, a story or an article. At this point I find it pertinent to look into the teachers' point of view when it comes to the teaching of genres. The focus on genres has been stronger in the Norwegian school subject than in the English. However, over the last decade, and especially after the implementation of L97 the focus on genres has increased, and it is also emphasized more strongly in the syllabus in all three years in lower secondary school.

From the figures in table 8.6 above, one can safely say that the teachers participating in this survey are conscious of the fact that their pupils need information and knowledge about the different genres they may be asked to write at the final written exam. I find the issue of the choice of tasks interesting and as an examiner grading papers I made a quantitative study, showing the distribution of the tasks. There were 148 papers written by the pupils, but two of them had not written the number of the tasks on their papers so I have not included them.

<b>Task - genres</b>	<b>Number</b>
Task 1 - Diary entry/story/article for a school magazine	45 pupils
Task 2 - Story/fairy tale	21 pupils
Task 3 - Personal text	53 pupils
Task 4 - Letter to a local bank	10 pupils
Task 5 - Text/ Story	12 pupils
Task 6 - Personal text	5 pupils

*Table 8.7*

I discussed the issue of genres more closely in chapter 7 where I analyzed the exams given from 2000 and to 2006.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
16.	At my school previous exams are used for practice in the 10th grade.	70 %	26%	2 %	2 %	0 %	0 %

Table 8.8

This question is in line with number 14 above, but question 16 shows that the ‘washback’ effect is relevant here. Once again when commenting on the findings of this questionnaire, I find it useful to link it to my own experience. At my school we have used previous exams for practice for several years. It is practical and convenient to be able to use already existing exams for practice, and it is a definite advantage that the pupils can practise for their exam while teachers can practise assessing this exam. As can be seen from table 8.8 above, the majority of the teachers involved claims that they follow this practice. However, I believe the figures would have been different if the question had been whether they use it for practice from the 8th grade onwards. This can be seen below.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
17.	I regard this exam as the end of a 3-year course and use the exams, or part of the exams as practice from the 8th grade onwards.	15 %	13%	37 %	35 %	0 %	0 %

Table 8.9

There is a significant difference between table 8.8 and 8.9 and the difference shows quite clearly that the intention of the test designers that this exam should be used for practice from 8th grade onwards is not in accordance with the views of the teachers in the present survey. The reason why a number of teachers only use it for practice in

the 10th grade may be that they find it too difficult for the pupils in the 8th grade. I sympathize with this view to a certain extent, but there is room for adaptation to make it more suitable for the younger pupils. In my experience as an English teacher in the lower secondary school, I think that a lot of pupils have little practice in written English when they enter lower secondary school. They have only written short texts, or part of texts, and they have little or no practice with anything other than narrative texts. To present them with a previous exam at the end of term in the 8th grade would then be far too difficult, and this is where the adjustment is necessary. The idea is that it is possible to use parts of the exam for practice, and not use the whole booklet and all the tasks. As teachers we can pick out texts we think may be appropriate for our pupils in the 8th grade, and pick out tasks accordingly. By following this procedure it is possible to see the exam as the end of a 3 year course where elements of the exam, and finally the whole exam, are well known to our pupils. In my opinion teachers of English at the same school should discuss how to use previous exams, to obtain a similar practice.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
18.	I'm concerned about the fact that my pupils get good practice in reading strategies so that they may comprehend the texts in the booklet as well as possible.	15 %	48%	30 %	4 %	2 %	0 %

Table 8.10

This final exam model is said to be testing the pupils' overall competence in English. It is a written exam, but it is also a testing of reading competence. Hence, reading practice is of great importance. For some pupils getting a booklet of about 20 pages to read can be a quite an ordeal. The teacher plays an important part in encouraging the pupils to read extensively, and the more practice the pupils have in reading, the better equipped they are for succeeding at the final exam. According to table 8.13

above, there is room for improvement to make all pupils more familiar with appropriate reading strategies.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
19.	In my experience teachers have sufficient knowledge and practice in assessment and testing.	0 %	11%	17 %	72 %	0 %	0 %

*Table 8.11*

What these figures confirm is that educational authorities should take this issue seriously. As much as 72% of the teachers asked claim that they don't agree with the statement above. With the implementation of L97 we had some information about evaluation criteria, and there have been some possibilities to attend a course from time to time on the basis of personal initiative. However, it is my impression that some teachers still use the system they have always used, and focus on the correct application of rules of grammar in writing. In my opinion practice in assessment and testing should be a subject of its own in teachers' training programs, and also in teacher related studies at universities and colleges.

All teachers should have a minimum of practice in assessing pupils' texts, and standardized forms with evaluation criteria should be used i.e. the examiner's guidelines for the final exam. Anyway, the figures in table 8.11 above show clearly that this is an area in need of further research, and this is a responsibility for the educational authorities. There should be at least one person with examiner's experience at every school, and preferably more than one.



		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
20.	It is important for me to let my pupils make their own grammar book, and let them work with it on a regular basis from the 8th to the 10th grade.	37 %	41%	17 %	2 %	0 %	2 %

Table 8.12

This is an area with material for a thesis alone, and I believe that teachers differ in their opinion of the use of grammar books. I don't think I would be very wrong in saying there are many different opinions about what a grammar book should contain, and whether or not one should use it altogether. What is a grammar book? In English as a school subject we may use the names '*grammar book*' and '*pupils' book*'. The pupil's book is meant to be a pedagogical tool in the teaching process during the school year. The use of personal notes and finding support while working is a normal procedure, and the intention is that the pupils will encounter an exam model which is as close to real life as possible.

As can be seen in table 8.12, only 37% of the teachers claim that they think it is very important to work with a pupil's book from the 8th grade. Furthermore, not very many think that their pupils benefit from using this book on written tests and on the final exam. A pertinent question to ask is why. Why don't teachers think that their pupils benefit from using a pupil's book? Do they fail to see that this is a very useful tool for the pupils? Are they a bit uncertain themselves as to what to put in the pupil's book? The most crucial question is, in my opinion, to what extent they teach their pupils how to use it? You cannot expect an 8th grader to put in whatever he feels like, neither a 10th grader for that matter if he has no experience with it. This has to be taught, and the teacher has to guide his pupils, and start by telling them what to put in. Learning how to use a pupil's book takes time, and this time has to be taken from other activities teachers find more pertinent. As a consequence, some pupils actually

never have the option of using one at the exam. On a par with the memo sheet, the starting point for pupils regarding the exam will be different depending on what their teachers find it useful to spend time on.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
22.	I use an evaluation form when I mark written tests in the 10th grade.	37 %	24%	24 %	15 %	0 %	0 %

*Table 8.13*

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
24.	My pupils are familiar with the criteria which are used at the final exam.	20 %	35%	37 %	7 %	0 %	2 %

*Table 8.14*

As a teacher it is always exciting and interesting to see the results when your own pupils have passed an exam. Are the grades in concord with the grades you have given for the final term grade? If they are, you think that you have been rather fortunate. If your own grades as a subject teacher and those of the examiner diverge to a great extent, you may question your own ability to grade correctly. However, there is of course a difference between what pupils manage to achieve during a whole term, and what they actually perform in one day. You may have a good or a bad day, but throughout a whole term you have a better chance to show what you actually are capable of.

One salient issue in this connection is the evaluation form used at the exam. If you use this form yourself as a teacher throughout the lower secondary school, and you let your pupils become familiar with it, they know which criteria they will be assessed

by. Moreover, then they know that an examiner will assess them in the same way as their teacher does, and focus on the same criteria. The way I see it, this is an advantage for the pupils. However, many self made evaluation forms exist among teachers around the country, and to my knowledge there is no order telling teachers to use one particular form. However, as noted above the teachers are required to familiarize their pupils with the evaluation criteria used by the examiners at the final exam. Thus teachers should feel obliged to follow these regulations, but according to the figures in the tables above this is not necessarily the case.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
26.	I use process oriented approach to writing in English in my class, and would also like to use it at the final exam..	13 %	7%	20 %	54 %	4 %	2 %

*Table 8.15*

As mentioned before pupils are subject to their teacher's preference for teaching methods. I dealt with the POW in Chapter 5. Some teachers embrace this model, while others have no intention of trying it. According to the figures in the table above as much as 54% of the teachers asked claim that they would not use POW at the final exam, while 40% of the teachers agree or agree to a certain extent. And it is the teacher's prerogative to choose whether or not he would let his pupils work with a process oriented approach to writing. The guidelines of the exam state that pupils may use POW at the final exam, and that the time allotted may be extended with 90 minutes. Furthermore, the schools are obliged to find convenient, practical solutions.

This is also an area of discussion in relation to the exam. Do the pupils who use POW benefit from this in their writing, and do the results reflect this? To my knowledge the answer to these questions is unknown. First of all there is no record in the Board of Education to this effect, and as examiners we do not know specifically which pupils

or schools that have used POW. One of the examiners I interviewed maintained that he believes that POW has a positive effect on the pupils' texts. On the other hand some teachers claim that writing is an individual and private activity, and that we should not impose this method on all pupils. Not everybody feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with others, and what they have written is only meant for the teacher/examiner. The idea of reading his/her own text aloud to a group of peers, may seem frightening and pupils with low self-esteem will find this difficult, if not impossible. We know for a fact that teenagers from 13-16 are in the most vulnerable phase of their lives when it comes to exposing themselves to the opinions of their peers.

It would be interesting to know the reasons why teachers differ so much in opinion about this, but the fact remains that the use of POW at the final exam requires that the pupils have practised using it during the lower secondary school.

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
27.	At my school we have tried English with ICT at the final exam.	9 %	0	9 %	78 %	4 %	0 %

Table 8.16

		I totally agree	I agree	I agree to some extent	I don't agree	I don't know	Blank
28.	I would like to try English with ICT at the final exam.	26 %	33%	17 %	11 %	9 %	4 %

Table 8.17

As can be seen from the figures above 78% of the teachers has not tried English with ICT on the final exam, but as much as 76% agree to a large or a smaller degree that

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they would like to try it. In the guidelines for the exam it reads: *“Schools may choose to arrange the exam in English with ICT. These tests may be found on the Internet, and they are of a different nature than the ordinary exam. A prerequisite is that the schools have the necessary equipment to carry through an exam with ICT, and that the pupils have practised working with this model”*

*(Vedlegg til informasjon om skriftlige avgangsprøver i grunnskolen våren 2006:10, my translation).*

This short passage is of great importance to those who really want to try an alternative exam model. The current situation is that three exam models exist side by side, when we take into consideration the current model, the process oriented approach and English with ICT. Salient questions are who chooses which model to use at the different schools? Does the head master have the final word? Are the teachers allowed to express their wish? Many schools do not have the necessary equipment for it. Furthermore, teachers need to be competent in the use of ICT, and know how to arrange such an exam. The way I interpret the figures in tables 8.16 and 8.17 above is that several teachers would like to try English with ICT at the final exam if they were given the chance. Some schools are fortunate to have competent teachers who both have a genuine interest in working with ICT, and have an additional competence in it, while other schools are far worse off. In addition there must be an understanding within the administration at schools that they want to invest money in necessary equipment. And as we know, the situation in the different municipalities in Norway varies to a great degree depending on economic resources available. Thus in order to make this an offer for all schools there are a lot of improvements to be made and money to be spent. When all schools, no matter where they are situated have a real choice of using English with ICT at the final exam, we may say that we have a fair situation.

## 8.2 The use of PC as a tool for writing at the final exam

*“Schools that have classes or groups of pupils who have used PC in their education, and who thus want to use PC as a writing facility at the final exam in the lower secondary school should be given the opportunity to do so. Pupils may refrain from using a PC”*(LS-05-2003:1, my translation). The computer may have installed a word processing program and a correction program. The pupils are not allowed to bring their own computer to ensure that there is no additional help with the tasks. There are no specific directions in the examiner’s guidelines as to how to evaluate the typed exam papers, and I was a bit puzzled as an examiner as to how to deal with this. It is definitely an advantage to be able to use a PC, especially when it comes to editing the text, deleting, adding and not to mention using a correction program. At the examiners’ meeting there was some discussion regarding the length of the text. The free writing part requires two to four pages, but as we know two handwritten pages is not the same as two typed pages. There should be more accurate guidelines for this in the future. Furthermore, the directions for the exam of 2006 has a point saying that the use of PC as a tool for writing requires letter 12 or 14 and line spacing 1,5 distance. As it turned out several schools had not taken this seriously, and had not checked that the pupils followed these directions. A suggestion is that these directions are specified sufficiently at the exam so that there will be no doubt as to what applies for the handwritten and the typed exam paper respectively.

## 9. Conclusion

In the present chapter I will sum up the major finding of the previous chapters. I presented my research questions in Chapter 1, and I will deal with them in due course below. The choice of topic for this thesis has grown out of an interest on my part in the current arrangement of the final exam in English, and the ‘new’ practice which was implemented after L97. It is my conviction that teachers as a group should be asked from time to time about their opinions concerning their work, and the final exam is certainly a very important issue with relevance for most activities in the teaching of English as a school subject in the 10th grade. One syllabus succeeds another, and this is also the case with the final written exam. After almost a decade the school community in Norway was ready for a new syllabus, and the future of the final exam is not yet known.

My main objectives were to look into the practice of the exam. I have outlined the directions from the test designers in detail in Chapter 3, thus I do not find it necessary to quote them again at this point. My first question was to what extent the use of the preparation day is in accordance with its intention. The intention was, as mentioned in Chapter 3 to create an exam where the pupils should be given the opportunity to demonstrate and use their text competence.

The plan was that the administration at the schools should be responsible for planning the work at the preparation day, and the teachers should be present to guide and give advice, not to teach. The initial direction from the educational authorities was that the attendance at the preparation day was optional, but this was changed along the way, and the preparation day currently means mandatory attendance for the pupils. However, there is an offer to the pupils to stay on at school after the three mandatory lessons, but in my experience very few do.

I base my findings mainly on the data I collected in the survey I carried out in relation to teachers, from the interviews with two examiners, and on my own experience both

as a teacher and an examiner. In order for the preparation day to function as it was intended, the teachers have to feel that they know and recognize their own role at the preparation day. I know for a fact that the practice among my colleagues vary from one teacher to another, and the figures from my survey also show that more than half of the teachers asked find the instructions for the preparation day explicit and easy to relate to, whereas the rest do not, and thus the practice on the examination day may not be in accordance with the intention (See question 1 in appendix no. 5).

The further findings of my survey reveal that there is not a 100% consensus among the teachers asked whether they teach or not on this day and this may be an indication that some find it difficult to abandon their usual teacher role. More than half the teachers think that the pupils work well and in a systematic manner on this day, and that is also the impression of the two examiners I interviewed. Another important issue concerning the preparation day is that the pupils should have been taught the necessary strategies to make use of this day, in the sense that they have worked systematically with learning strategies and self directed learning. This is in line with L97 where the pupils should be a more active part in the learning process themselves.

My next research question was whether the booklet serves as an inspiration or a source of problems for the pupils. According to my findings, and the experience I have gained personally through the years after this exam was implemented, the booklet may be both an inspiration and a source of problems. First of all, the idea of the booklet as a pre-writing activity is in line with the communicative and meaning oriented approach to writing which is the prevailing theory of writing in EFL. The majority of the teachers asked answer that they think the pupils make good use of the booklet; however, as much as 26% of them says that they do not agree with this. The examiners asked maintain that they think the pupils benefit from using the booklet, and that this is reflected in the texts they write.

However, the source of problems I referred to in my question is that the booklet is taxing to read for pupils who have not acquired good reading strategies, and who find reading 20-23 pages prior to the exam very difficult. I know from personal



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experience with my own pupils that this may be the case, and it seems like this aspect of the exam is also recognized in the upper secondary school, especially in the vocational courses. An important effect of the reading of the booklet is that the pupils make use of a top-down approach to reading, which I dealt with in Chapter 4, and that the pupils may benefit from the cognitive processes involved in reading. As I will show in my further discussion, the role of the teacher is of vital importance regarding the reading of the booklet, as well as with regard to other aspects of the exam.

It is stated clearly by the test designers that the testing of English should reflect the teaching, and this applies both to the traditional exam model and the exam with ICT. The teacher of EFL of the 10th grade feel that time is limited with regard to both the oral and the written exam. The third research question focus on the way English is taught during lower secondary school and to what extent the exam influences the teaching. Ideally the teaching of English should provide the pupils with necessary strategies both in reading and writing in order to succeed at the final exam. An intention from the test designers was to regard this exam as the end of a three year course, and let the pupils be familiar with all the aspects of the exam, including the criteria of the evaluation form. The tables 8.6, 8.8, 8.9 and 8.10 in Chapter 8 all deal with the teaching of EFL and the influence it has on the final exam.

I have discussed these tables above, thus I will just briefly comment on them at this point. Not all teachers in my survey agree that the final exam influences the way they teach oral and written English, and from my personal experience I know that is the case. Most teachers in my survey agree that they are concerned with the teaching of genres, and hopefully the focus on genres will gain more ground in English as a school subject in the future. The ‘washback’ effect is strong regarding the use of previous exams for practice, but this applies mostly to the 10th grade. The figures in table 8.10 about the focus on the teaching of reading strategies show that there should be more emphasis on the reading of the booklet.

The examiners I interviewed answered that the exam without doubt influences the way they teach English, and that they think it is important to focus on the skills the

pupils will be tested in at the exam. My impression is that there is an increasing interest for the principle that the testing should reflect the teaching; however, I think that several teachers have to change their teaching practice to be more in accordance with the testing practice. One issue of vital importance is to teach the pupils how to reflect upon a text, and express their opinions regarding a definite topic. One can safely conclude that the more we as teachers know about the exam, and the theory of CLT, the more we let the exam influence our teaching.

The issue of study facilities like the grammar book and the memo sheet is an under researched area the way I see it, and this assumption was confirmed by the findings of my survey. One reason why the pupils only benefit from using these to a small extent is that they do not use them, thus they cannot benefit from them. My own experience as an examiner, supported by the data collected from the interviews is that many pupils handed in blank memo sheets. There was a large variation from carefully filled-in memo sheets, to those that contained some casual notes, and to those which actually were blank. The figures from my survey show that there are different opinions among the teachers concerning the issue of study facilities, and the examiners I interviewed feel that this is an under exploited area as well.

As noted above, the pupils must work with the grammar books in a careful and structured way from the 8th grade onwards, monitored by the teacher, if it is going to have a positive effect on the production of written texts. Furthermore, in order to make use of the memo sheet, the teachers must focus on how the memo sheets can empower them. According to Langeland what might easily have been a godsend has clearly been only a partial success (*Språk og Språkundervisning 1/03*). My conclusion on this research question will be the same as hers, and the practice of the use of grammar book and memo sheet will have to undergo a substantial change in the years to come in order to be beneficiary for the pupils.

Do all pupils get the opportunity to show what they can do in the language? This is the intention of the test designers, and the major change compared to previous exams is that the tasks of the exam give the pupils an opportunity to answer well or less well

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and not correct and wrong. According to one of the examiners I interviewed this is also his impression. The exams before L97 were more concerned with a detailed registration of scores than of enabling the pupils to express themselves in more 'open' tasks. The idea is that the day of the exam should be a day where the pupils feel they have accomplished a task, and the reading of the booklet and the work at the preparation day is parts of this task. All pupils can write something, and as long as they have the booklet available and use it, they may get the information they need, and find answers to the tasks of Part A.

An area which has reached increased attention is the use of PC as a writing tool, and many pupils in fact used this at the exam of 2006. Experience from teachers and pupils alike show that pupils benefit from using a PC, and even pupils who normally find it difficult to write in English benefit from using it. It is easier to edit a text on the PC and rewrite parts of the text. In classes using POW at the final exam the use of PC is a very useful tool. Thus, one of the challenges for the lower secondary schools in Norway in the next few years is to be able to give all pupils an opportunity to use PC at the final exam.

My final research question was to what extent the examiner's task has changed after L97. There were some reactions after the implementation of the current exam concerning reliability and objectivity, especially with the strong emphasis on personal judgement on the part of the examiners. The current exam is part of the integrative testing paradigm, and it was considered that this testing could easily be a subjective process because of the focus on judgement. On the other hand, objective tests, tests which were scored mechanically, were often regarded as more reliable.

The current evaluation form used by the examiners was introduced in 1999, and the most obvious difference is the use of verbal comments instead of scores as in the previous forms. In her thesis L.M. Hjelmtvedt has compared evaluation forms before and after L97, and she has also looked into the examiners' reactions to the exam sets and evaluation guidelines given from 1990 to 2004. She maintains that the introduction of more 'open' tasks, and hence, more subjective assessment has caused

distress among the examiners (Hjelmtvedt 2004:99-100). The data I collected by means of the interviews show that the main difference between the examiners' task before and after L97 is the focus on personal judgement on the part of the examiner. Some will say that this is a problem, and they may miss the scores which made it easy to decide whether an answer was right or wrong. On the other hand, many examiners welcome the opportunity to shift the focus from negative features in the text to a more personal approach where the pupils' communication skills are emphasized.

The two examiners I interviewed express clearly that they do not believe they have difficulties giving each pupil an objective assessment, and my own experience as an examiner is that the grades I suggested accorded to a large extent with those of my co-examiner. However, some comments in the final report from the examiners of 2006, suggested that there still are some objections to and uncertainties concerning the criteria of the evaluation form, and I believe not all of them are equally easy to relate to. One salient point is that the teachers should use these criteria systematically, in order to be familiar with them, and the pupils should know them too. In my opinion, all teachers should be obliged to use them to ensure a common platform of assessment.

My final conclusion will be that the exam according to L97 is in harmony with the communicative and meaning oriented theory of teaching, and the pupils are given the opportunities to show their skills of EFL. After six years of using the current exam, most teachers have become familiar with the different elements of the exam.

However, there are aspects of the exam which should be improved e.g. a more homogenous practice of the preparation day. As to teaching, more focus on reading strategies throughout the lower secondary school is called for. Furthermore, teachers should be more aware of the different approaches to writing, e.g. the POW and give the pupils an opportunity to practise it from the 8th grade onwards. An under exploited possibility is the use of grammar books and memo sheets, and teachers should definitely face to this challenge and contribute to an effective use of these study facilities.

The evaluation forms changed after L97, and the view of assessment changed as well, as noted above. However, as far as I have been able to find out, many teachers feel that they have not kept up with the changes, and have far too little competence in assessment. The teachers asked in my survey and the examiners I interviewed, express that this is a neglected area, and more competence is needed. As expressed in the interviews, one way of acquiring more competence is by signing up as an examiner, but sadly many teachers feel that there is too much pressure in their work already, and there is no room for additional tasks. This is clearly a challenge for the educational authorities.

Through the work with this thesis I have been able to look into some areas of the final exam which I find very relevant and interesting. I wanted to find out what my fellow teachers thought about the issues I presented, and the figures of my survey confirm what I initially believed to be the current situation, namely that the practice among teachers with regard to the final exam vary to a great extent. I cannot claim that this is representative for all teachers of EFL. However, I believe it to some extent gives a reliable picture of the present situation, and it may be a signal to the educational authorities both locally and nationally that they should ensure that teachers follow the same practice. An educated guess is that the current exam will be subject to change in a few years in line with the implementation of the new syllabus K06. The focus on digital competence is increasing, and the exam will reflect this. Today's practice with three different models at the final exam will probably be replaced by an exam with ICT for all pupils. It is of vital importance that the teachers of EFL will get the necessary skills and practice in relation to assessment in order to give their pupils the best preparation for the final exam.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Introduksjonsbrev til lærere

ORIENTERING TIL ENGELSK LÆRERE ANG. SPØRRESKJEMA.

Kjære kolleger!

Jeg holder for tiden på med en masteroppgave i engelsk didaktikk ved UiO, Institutt for lærerutdanning og skoleutvikling (ILS). Dette opplever jeg som veldig interessant og nyttig, ikke minst for egen undervisning. Tema for oppgaven min er avgangsprøven i engelsk for 10. klasse og måten den blir gjennomført på. Jeg er også spesielt interessert i hvordan engelsklærerne i Skien kommune opplever gjeldende eksamensformen, blant annet forberedelsesdagen og booklet. Jeg har selv vært med på noen runder med denne formen, og jeg vil gjerne vite litt om hvordan kolleger opplever og gjennomfører avgangsprøven ved sine respektive skoler.

Første gangen denne formen for avgangsprøve i engelsk ble gjennomført var i 2000, og det er vel litt ulikt hvor mange ganger deres skoler har blitt trukket ut til å ha avgangsprøve i engelsk. Temaene for avgangsprøven har vært:

- 2000 – We are the world, we are the future...
- 2001 – Times to remember
- 2002 – Animals
- 2003 – People's lives
- 2004 – Shrinking the world
- 2005 – Challenges

Jeg vil være svært takknemlig hvis dere kan ta dere tid til å svare på et spørreskjema som jeg har utformet i samarbeid med min veileder ved ILS professor Aud Marit Simensen, som for øvrig mener det bør forskes mye mer på lærernes oppfatninger og meninger. Spørreskjemaet består av påstander som jeg ønsker at dere skal ta stilling til, slik at "svært enig" stemmer helt med egen praksis, men "ikke enig" stemmer ikke. Jeg har også fått klarsignal fra skolesjef Tormod Aulebo. Spørreskjemaet til lærerne vil utgjøre en viktig del av oppgaven min, og i likhet med min veileder mener jeg dette kan være viktig og lærerik dokumentasjon både for elever, lærere, skoleetaten i kommunen og ikke minst for de som utformer avgangsprøven i engelsk.

Jeg vil gjerne ha spørreskjemaet tilbake før påskeferien. Det er fint hvis dere kan be seksjonsleder i engelsk sende dem samlet tilbake. Hvis dere har utfyllende opplysninger som dere mener kan være relevante for oppgaven min, eller har spørsmål så ta gjerne kontakt med meg.

På forhånd takk for velvilje!


Tlf. skole: 35 91 57 70  
Mob.: 99 23 96 72  
e-post. inger-ar@online.no

Mvh

Inger A. Reisjø (Klyve skole)

Figure 9.1

## Appendix 2. Evaluation form for English

 Utdanningsdirektoratet

**EVALUATION FORM FOR ENGLISH**

**Pupil number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Mark:** \_\_\_\_\_


<b>First impression of the exam paper:</b>	<b>Above average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Below average</b>

<b>EVALUATION CRITERIA</b>	<b>Fully</b>	<b>Partly</b>	<b>Barely/No</b>
<b>COMPREHENSION:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has the pupil understood the texts in the Booklet?</li> <li>- Has the pupil understood the message in the texts?</li> <li>- Has the pupil understood techniques and conventions used in the texts?</li> </ul>			
<b>CONTENT:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does the pupil demonstrate a willingness to communicate?</li> <li>- Is the content interesting, imaginative and relevant?</li> <li>- Does the text correspond to the intention of the task?</li> <li>- Does the pupil demonstrate cultural competence?</li> <li>- Does the pupil demonstrate ability to develop the text by e.g. reasoning, describing, reflecting, narrating, exploring, arguing etc?</li> </ul>			
<b>STRUCTURE:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does the text comply with genre requirements, if any?</li> <li>- Does the text signal awareness of the reader?</li> <li>- Is the text well organised by means of e.g. titles, paragraphs and syntax?</li> <li>- Does the pupil make use of linking words and phrases?</li> </ul>			
<b>LANGUAGE:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is the language sufficiently good to 'get the message across'?</li> <li>- Is the language ambitious?</li> <li>- Is the language idiomatic?</li> <li>- Is the language accurate?</li> <li>- Is the spelling accurate?</li> </ul>			
<b>CONCLUSION</b>			

Figure 9.2



## Appendix 3. Skjema for vurdering av oppgåva i engelsk – IKT

 Utdanningsdirektoratet

### SKJEMA FOR VURDERING AV OPPGÅVA I ENGELSK – IKT

<b>Elevnummer:</b>	<b>Karakter:</b>		
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<b>Førsteintrykket av oppgåva:</b>	<b>Over middels</b>	<b>Middels</b>	<b>Under middels</b>
------------------------------------	---------------------	----------------	----------------------

<b>VURDERINGSKRITERIUM</b>	<b>I stor grad</b>	<b>Delvis</b>	<b>I liten grad</b>
<b>KJELDETILVISING:</b> - klare kjeldetilvisingar/web-adresser på notatarket?	.....	.....	.....
<b>INNHALD:</b> - Viser eleven vilje til å kommunisere? - Er innhaldet interessant, kreativt og relevant? - Er det samsvar mellom svaret og intensjonen i oppgåva? - Viser eleven kulturkunnskap? - Viser eleven evne til å utvikle innhaldet i teksten ved t.d å argumentere, skildre, reflektere, fortelje, grunngje og/eller utdjupe?	.....	.....	.....
<b>TEKSTBYGGING:</b> - Oppfyller svaret eventuelle sjangerkrav? - Er elevsvaret retta mot lesaren? mottakarorientert? - Er teksten godt organisert ved t.d. overskrift(er), avsnitt og oppbygging av setningane (klare setningar)? - Bruker eleven tekstbinding?	.....	.....	.....
<b>SPRÅK:</b> - Er språket godt nok til å formidle eit innhald? - Er språket ambisiøst? - Er språket idiomatisk? - Er språket presist? - Er rettskrivinga god?	.....	.....	.....
<b>HEILSKAPLEG VURDERING AV OPPGÅVA:</b>			

Figure 9.3

## Appendix 4. Summary of the interviews with two examiners

### **A summary of the two interviews**

I interviewed two lower secondary school teachers from Telemark, Carl Magne Isachsen and Jarl Håvard Borgen, who have been examiners for nine and three years respectively. Thus, one of them has only examiner's experience from the exam after L97.

They both express that they value the experience they get from being examiners, and that they believe this is an under exploited area in Norwegian lower secondary schools. More teachers should have examiner's experience according to them. Furthermore, the experience from the examiner's work influence the way they teach EFL during lower secondary school, and they regard it as very important that they know what is required of the pupils at the final exam.

One of my questions was whether it is easier or more difficult to be an examiner after L97. According to C.M Isachsen, who has been an examiner nine times, it is easier because assessment of language depends on personal judgement. Some would claim that it would be easier to give points for correct answers, and have a suggested grade to use, while others, like Isachsen welcomes the opportunity to use his personal judgement. In response to the same question, J.H. Borgen maintains that he thinks the crucial difference before and after L97 is that the examiners' main objective is currently to discover and analyze what the pupils actually know and have accomplished. Furthermore, on the question of objectivity both examiners expressed that they find it easy to a large extent to assess the pupils objectively. Although, J.H. Borgen points to the fact that there will always be elements of subjectivity as long as human raters are involved. The criteria used in the evaluation form are, in his opinion, objective.

The strength of this exam is, according to the examiners interviewed, the free writing part where the pupils are given the opportunity to show what they know and communicate this to the reader. They are not asked to reproduce facts, but to use the knowledge they have acquired over time. One objection, however, is that if a pupil have a bad day at the exam, the result will be bad, which is the case with all time allotted tests.

On the question of reliability, both examiners confirm that they think the current arrangement is satisfactory, and that was also the general opinion among the group of examiners on the report form from the head of examiners. The two examiners share the views of the majority of the examiners referred to above.

One issue which I found somewhat disturbing myself was that some pupils and classes were given the opportunity to use PC as a tool for writing, while others were not. One of the examiners expressed that he didn't think the use of PC or not was significant for the result of the exam, while the other maintained that he believed that pupils generally benefit from using it, especially weak pupils. The directions state that pupils may use a PC, which means that this is an option for pupils at schools where they have the necessary equipment, and where the pupils have practiced using a PC as a writing tool. In my opinion, I believe there should be some directions to the examiners as to the assessment of papers in handwriting or typed on a PC.

The use of POW at the final exam was also on of my questions in the interview, and J.H. Borgen was of the opinion that there is a distinct difference between the traditional writing model and POW at the final exam, and that the pupils using POW benefit from this with regard to both length and content. Furthermore, the two examiners both believe that the final exam with ICT will be a compulsory arrangement within the next few years, and that the teachers involved need to get the necessary practice and knowledge to keep up with the development. As to the issue of the study facilities at the final exam, especially the memo sheet, the two examiners express that this is the weak spot of the whole exam and that this should be used more extensively.

Finally, J.H Borgen and C.M Isachsen conclude that teachers of EFL generally do not have the necessary practice and knowledge in assessment and testing, and that this is a huge challenge for the educational authorities. The examiners get more competent, according to the examiners I interviewed, but many teachers also need more knowledge. According to Borgen this should be a compulsory subject at every teacher training program. The experience and knowledge one acquires as an examiner is of invaluable importance, and many more teachers should sign up to be examiners. All schools should have one or more teachers with special competence as an examiner. Isachsen suggests that trained examiners may share their experiences and guide their colleagues.

The work of the examiners should be upgraded, and the payment should be increased the way Borgen sees is. He furthermore claims that the biggest challenge for examiners is having enough time to do such an important job. Examiners do this task in addition to their regular teaching, and one way of recruiting more examiners may be to let them have more time available. The biggest challenge for examiners according to Isachsen is to create a community of interpretation, find some common ground, use the same criteria and be able to assess to the best of our ability in an objective way.

Figure 9.5 Page 2



## Appendix 5. Questionnaire with results

THE FINAL WRITTEN EXAM IN ENGLISH FOR THE 10TH GRADE - QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS																			
						Amount pr.					Blank	Percent pr.					Blank		
I strongly agree: 1, I agree: 2, I agree to some extent: 3, I disagree: 4, I don't know: 5, Blank: 6						resp. alternative						resp. alternative							
						1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5			
1	I find the instructions for the preparation day for the final exam in English explicit and easy to relate to.						2	25	13	4	1	1		4	54	28	9	2	2
2	I teach my pupils on this day, and suggest what they should do in relation to the texts.						9	12	13	12	0	0		20	26	28	26	0	0
3	I let my pupils work on their own on this day, and I am only present as an advisor.						5	14	14	13	0	0		11	30	30	28	0	0
4	In my experience the English teachers at my school practice the preparation day the same way.						7	15	13	7	2	2		15	33	28	15	4	4
5	The administration at my school gives clear directions as to how this day should be used.						2	9	14	21	0	0		4	20	30	46	0	0
6	In my experience the pupils read the booklet well before meeting at school on the preparation day.						2	4	28	11	1	0		4	9	61	24	2	0
7	In my experience the pupils work well and in a systematic manner on the preparation day.						2	6	28	10	0	0		4	13	61	22	0	0
8	In my experience the pupils find the topic of the booklet exciting and interesting.						3	12	25	3	0	3		7	26	54	7	0	7
9	I find the amount of text in the booklet appropriate.						4	19	12	8	0	3		9	41	26	17	0	7
10	I believe some of the texts are too difficult, and poor readers suffer from this.						9	14	17	5	0	1		20	30	37	11	0	2
11	In my experience the pupils make good use of the booklet, and this is reflected in the texts they write.						0	3	31	12	0	0		0	7	67	26	0	0
12	I recommend my pupils to use a memo-sheet at the exam.						31	14	0	0	0	1		67	30	0	0	0	2
13	In my experience most students benefit from using a memo-sheet.						4	8	22	10	2	0		9	17	48	22	4	0
14	The final exam influences the way I usually teach written and oral English.						0	13	22	11	0	0		0	28	48	24	0	0
15	I'm concerned about the fact that my pupils will have sufficient knowledge about the different genres they encounter at the written exam.						10	23	12	1	0	0		22	50	26	2	0	0
16	At my school previous exams are used for practice in the 10th grade.						32	12	1	1	0	0		70	26	2	2	0	0
17	I regard this exam as the end of a 3-year course and use the exams, or part of the exams as practice from the 8th grade onwards						7	6	17	16	0	0		15	13	37	35	0	0
18	I'm concerned about the fact that my pupils will get good practice in reading strategies so that they may comprehend the texts in the booklet as well as possible.						7	22	14	2	1	0		15	48	30	4	2	0
19	In my experience teachers have sufficient knowledge and practice in assessment and testing						0	5	8	33	0	0		0	11	17	72	0	0
20	It's important for me to let my pupils make their own grammar book, and let them work with it on a regular basis from the 8th to the 10th grade.						17	19	8	1	0	1		37	41	17	2	0	2
21	In my experience most pupils use a grammar book, and benefit from it both on written texts and at the final exam.						4	14	22	6	0	0		9	30	48	13	0	0
22	I use an evaluation form when I mark written tests in the 10th grade.						17	11	11	7	0	0		37	24	24	15	0	0
23	I find the evaluation criteria in this form explicit and concise.						6	13	19	4	2	2		13	28	41	9	4	4
24	My pupils are familiar with the criteria which are used at the final exam.						9	16	17	3	0	1		20	35	37	7	0	2
25	I like this exam model, and think that it measures pupils' knowledge of written and oral English in a satisfactory way.						5	21	14	5	0	1		11	46	30	11	0	2
26	I use process oriented approach to writing in English in my class, and would also like to use it at the final exam.						6	3	9	25	2	1		13	7	20	54	4	2
27	At my school we have tried English with ICT at the final exam.						4	0	4	36	2	0		9	0	9	78	4	0
28	I would like to try English with ICT at the final exam.						12	15	8	5	4	2		26	33	17	11	9	4

Figure 9.6